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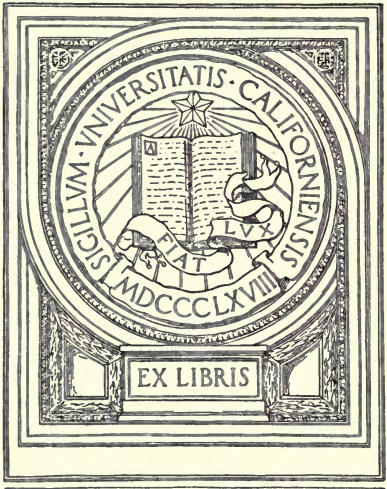

SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

Publiſhed from the original Manuſcripts,

By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Editors think it neceſſary to ſignify, that the three Volumes of Sermons, now offered to the Public, are the laſt of Archbiſhop SECKER's Works, which they intend to print. Of theſe, the fifth and ſeventh conſiſt of miſcellaneous Sermons, not at all inferior, as they conceive, to the former Volumes. The ſixth contains a Series of Diſcourſes, *on Scripture*, *on the Engliſh Liturgy*, and *againſt Popery*; ſome of which they once doubted whether it would be adviſeable to make public. But ſeveral of the Author's Friends, who had heard them preached, and received great Satisfaction from them, were extremely deſirous to have them all collected into one Volume, and added to the two others. This induced the Editors not only to give theſe Diſcourſes a ſecond and more careful Examination, but to ſubmit them to the Peruſal of a Perſon of high Rank in the Church and acknowledged Abilities, who thought them much too uſeful and inſtructive

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to be ſuppreſſed: eſpecially as both the Nature of the Subjects, and the Manner of treating them, gave them ſome Affinity to the *Lectures on the Church Catechiſm*. On theſe Grounds, the Editors now give them to the World; and have little Doubt but that theſe concluding Volumes will meet with the ſame Approbation which the preceding ones have received from all Ranks of People.

It may be proper to add, that the *nine Sermons*, on the War and Rebellion, publiſhed in the Year 1758, by the Author himſelf when he was Biſhop of *Oxford*, which were out of Print, and much ſought after, are now reprinted, by the Bookſellers, with the Addition of the *Anſwer to Dr. Mayhew*, and the *Letter to Mr. Horace Walpole*. This Volume, together with the fourteen *occaſional Sermons*, printed by his Grace in 1766, the two Volumes of *Lectures on the Church Catechiſm*, one of *Charges*, &c. and ſeven of *Sermons*, publiſhed ſince his Death, complete his Grace's Works in twelve Volumes *Octavo*.

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P. 82. l. 14. for *harſhre* read *harſher*.
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SERMON

SERMON I.

MATTH. xxviii. 19, 20.

Go ye therefore, and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt:

Teaching them to obſerve all Things, whatſoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World. Amen.

THESE Words contain that great Commiſſion and Charter, granted by our Saviour to his Apoſtles and their Succeſſors, by Virtue of which we and all Mankind have been called to the Knowledge and Practice of true Religion, inforced by the Motives of eternal Felicity or Miſery. As it had been chiefly in *Galilee*, that he inſtructed his Diſciples before his Death: ſo he appointed them to retire thither after his Reſurrection,

that he might add to his Inſtructions whatever then became proper; and more fully acquaint them with ſuch Things, as *pertained to the Kingdom of God* [a]. There, our Evangeliſt informs us, he appeared to them on a Mountain: perhaps the ſame, on which he had begun to open the Doctrine of Chriſtianity, in that noble Diſcourſe, which we have in the Fifth and following Chapters of this Goſpel; and given them a Specimen of his and their future Glory, at his Tranſfiguration [b]. *When they ſaw him*, the Generality immediately *worſhipped him: but ſome*, we are told with the uſual Fairneſs of the ſacred Writers, *doubted* [c]. Whether theſe were only Perſons, who accompanied the Apoſtles, and had not yet ſeen him ſince he roſe again: or whether ſome of the Apoſtles themſelves, who might not with Certainty know him at a Diſtance, is not clear. But the Doubts of either could not but vaniſh, when *Jeſus came up* to them, as St. *Matthew* aſſures us he did, for ſo the original Word ſignifies [d], and converſed familiarly with them. Many ſuch Converſations he held with theſe his Followers: for St.

[a] Acts i. 3. [b] Grot. in Loc. ſaith, There is ancient Tradition for the laſt. See Reland Palæſt. p. 334, &c.
[c] v. 17. [d] Προσελθων, v. 18.

Luke

Luke in their Acts informs us, that they continued *Forty Days* [c]. But the Substance of them all must be, what the Text expresses: where, in Consequence of that Fulness of *Power*, which he tells them, in the foregoing Words, was *given him* over all Things *in Heaven and in Earth; as the Father had sent Him, He sends Them* [f], to *make Disciples*, for that is the more accurate Rendering [g], not of the Jews alone, but of *all Nations*. And that they may do it rightly and effectually, he distinctly sets forth,

I. The Doctrines, they were to teach.

II. The Duties, they were to enjoin.

III. The Protection and Happiness, of which they might assure, both themselves, and all those, who faithfully preached his Gospel, and who sincerely embraced it.

I. The Doctrines, they were to teach. These are briefly, but sufficiently, comprehended in the Direction of *baptizing* Men *in the Name*

[c] Acts i. 3. [f] John xx. 21.

[g] Μαθητευω is not used in the Septuagint: nor Μαθητης. In the New Testament it is found thrice, besides the Text: and signifies to make Disciples, Acts xiv. 21. to be a Disciple, Matth. xxvii. 57. and in the passive Voice may signify, to be made a Disciple, Matth. xiii. 52. It signifies also in Plutarch, to be a Disciple. See Steph. in Voc.

of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt: for the better underſtanding of which Phraſe, it will be proper to explain,

1. What is meant by being *baptized in the Name* of any one, and particularly of theſe three.

2. What is the Faith in theſe three, which our Baptiſm requires us to profeſs.

1. For the completer Apprehenſion of the former of theſe Points, it will be uſeful to obſerve, that in our Saviour's Days, it had been an ancient Cuſtom amongſt the Jews, when any Gentile forſook Idolatry, and believed the Law of *Moſes*, to receive him into their Religion, amongſt other Ceremonies, by Baptiſm: as indeed they had themſelves been prepared for the Reception of that Law, by a ſolemn and religious Waſhing, as we read Exod. xix. Nay even the Heathens made uſe of Purifications by Water, when they initiated, or entered, any one into the Myſteries of their Deities. And this Rite being not only thus univerſally uſed, but alſo naturally expreſſive of thoſe two Things, which, on profeſſing Chriſtianity, chiefly wanted to be expreſſed: a Promiſe, on our Part, carefully to preſerve ourſelves pure, from the Defilement of Sin, through

through the Aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit; and a Promiſe, on God's Part, graciouſly to conſider us, as pure from the Guilt of it, through the Merits of his Son: therefore our bleſſed Lord condeſcended to make this the Form of entering into his Religion alſo. But at the ſame Time, he throughly diſtinguiſhed the Chriſtian Baptiſm, both from that of the Heathens, who were baptized into Superſtitions and idolatrous Follies; and from that of the Jewiſh Proſelytes, who were baptized, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, into *Moſes* [h], by directing, that His Followers ſhould be *baptized in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt.*

In the Language of Scripture, Doing any Thing in the Name of God, ſignifies Doing it by Virtue of his Authority. Thus our Saviour ſaith to the Jews, *I am come in my Father's Name, and ye receive me not: If another ſhall come in his own Name, Him ye will receive* [i]. In this Senſe Baptiſm is adminiſtered in the Name of the Holy Trinity, being a divine Appointment, with a diſtinct Reference to each of the three Perſons. And in this Senſe the Phraſe appears to have been uſed by

[h] 1 Cor. x. 2. [i] John v. 43.

St. *Peter*, when he *commanded* the Family of *Cornelius to be baptized in the Name of the Lord*[k]: that is, by Virtue of his Commiſſion *to baptize all Nations*. Till that Day, the Apoſtles had underſtood this only concerning Jews and Proſelytes of all Nations. But now, St. *Peter* being ſent by expreſs Revelation to *Cornelius*, a Gentile; and perceiving, in the Midſt of his Diſcourſe to Him and his Friends, that, on their believing, *the Holy Ghoſt was fallen upon them*[l], Gentiles as they were: after ſome Aſtoniſhment, he argues very juſtly, *Can any Man forbid Water, that theſe ſhould not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghoſt, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the Name of the Lord*[m]: that is, in purſuance of our Saviour's general Direction.

But though the Expreſſion in the Text undoubtedly implies this Meaning, yet it comprehends a further one. For the Phraſe tranſlated IN *the Name*, is different from that in the Paſſage relating to St. *Peter*, and ſignifies in Strictneſs, INTO *the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt*: which Word, *into*, the New

[k] Acts x. 48. [l] v. 44. [m] v. 47, 48.

Teſtament

Teſtament uſes nine Times beſides [n], in ſpeaking of Baptiſm, whereas it uſes a Word ſignifying, *in*, at moſt, but once beſides [o]. The particular Import of this Term, I ſhall now explain to you.

It hath ever been uſual, that the Believers or Profeſſors of any Doctrine ſhould be called by a Name, derived from the firſt or chief Teacher of that Doctrine. And by whatever Form or Ceremony they declared themſelves his Diſciples, by the ſame they were underſtood to

[n] Acts viii. 16. xix. 3, 5. Rom. vi. 3. 1 Cor. i. 13, 15. x. 2. xii. 13. Gal. iii. 27.

[o] Acts ii. 38; where the Prepoſition is *επι*. Now, *επι τω ονοματι* appears to ſignify the ſame thing as *εν τω ονοματι*. Matth xxiv. 5. Mark ix. 39, xiii. 6. Luke ix. 49, xxi. 8. Acts iv. 18, v. 28, 40. *Επι τω ονοματι* ſignifies alſo *for the Sake of*, or *from Regard to*; Matth. xviii. 5. Mark ix. 37. Luke ix. 48; and ſo doth *εις το ονομα*, Matth. x. 41, 42; as doth לשם. Thus the Samaritans circumciſed their Children לשם הר גריזים into the Name of Mount Gerizim. Avoda Sara, Fol. 27. 1. in Schoetg. Hor. Heb. in Matth. xxviii, 20; i. e. *devoted him to the Worſhip there inſtituted*; of which Schwarzius, in his *Exercitationes in Pent. Sam.* Witemb. 1756, p. 51, ſaith the Explanation is (as he cites it from the Talmudical Book, כסכת חולין *Edzardi Ed. Hamb.* 1710, p. 42) that they circumciſed them לשם דמית בראש הר גריזים ועובדיו לה עבודה in or into the Name of the Image on the Top of Mount Gerizim, which Image they worſhip, and circumciſe their Children לשם היונה זה in, or into, the Name of this Dove. The only Places where the Phraſe *εις το ονομα* occurs beſides, are, John i. 12, ii. 23, iii. 18, 1 John v. 13; where the Phraſe is *πιστευειν εις το ονομα*; and Matth. xviii. 20. *συνηγμενοι εις το εμον ονομα*. Here ſome underſtand it, *for my Sake*, others *to pray in my Name*, others *by Virtue of my Command*.

take upon them his Name. Thus the Jews, when, taking *Moſes* for their Prophet and Guide, they followed him into the Midſt of the Red Sea, are ſaid by St. *Paul*, in Alluſion to the Water through which they paſſed, to have been *baptized into Moſes* [p]: which is equivalent to ſaying, that they were baptized into the Name of *Moſes*. Not that in Fact the Jews called themſelves by his Name, as the ſeveral Sects of Philoſophers did by the Names of their ſeveral Leaders. For the Doctrine, which *Moſes* taught, was not his own: and the Obedience, which he required, was not to himſelf; but to God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth. And therefore, when the Jews were thus baptized into *Moſes*, they were at the ſame Time, in a much higher Senſe, baptized into the Name of God: taking that upon them, as an Acknowledgement of their being His: for Servants are known by the Name of their Lord. In Scripture therefore God himſelf ſtiles them, *My People, which are called by my Name* [q]. And they plead with him, *We are called by thy Name, leave us not* [r]: and elſewhere declare, *All People will walk every one*

[p] 1 Cor. x. 2. [q] 2 Chr. vii. 14. [r] Jer. xiv. 9. In the Hebrew it is, *Thy Name is called over us.*

in

in the Name of his God: and we will walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever [s]. As then the Moabites were called by the Name of their God, the People of *Chemoſh* [t]; and the other idolatrous Nations in like Manner; ſo were the Iſraelites called by the Name of the true God. And whoever by Baptiſm, amongſt other Ceremonies, profeſſed himſelf a Convert to Judaiſm, he was, properly ſpeaking, baptized into the ſame Name.

When therefore the Chriſtian Religion was publiſhed; as Proſelytes to the old Diſpenſation had been baptized into *Moſes*, taking Him for their Lawgiver and Inſtructor: ſo Believers in the New were baptized into Chriſt, receiving Him for their Lord and Maſter. And as the former were in Effect baptized into the Name of the one true God, aſſuming the Denomination of his Servants: ſo the latter, being more fully inſtructed concerning the Object of Worſhip, were profeſſedly and in Form *baptized into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghoſt:* taking this Name upon them, to believe in and obey for the future, as their Badge of Diſtinction from all other Men. Whence our Saviour, in his

[s] Mic. iv. 5. [t] Numb. xxi. 29. Jer. xlviii. 46.

Prayer

Prayer for his Diſciples, ſaith to the Father, *While I was with them in the World, I kept them in thy Name: Holy Father, keep through thine own Name thoſe whom thou haſt given me* [u]. And in his Exhortation to the Angel of the Church of *Pergamos*, he ſaith, *Thou holdeſt faſt my Name, and haſt not denied my Faith* [w].

It muſt be acknowledged indeed, that being baptized into the Name of theſe three, is no where expreſsly mentioned, except in the Text. But then the more uſual Phraſe, of being baptized into Chriſt, or into His Name, amounts to juſt the ſame Thing. For by bearing the Name of Chriſtians, we declare ourſelves Believers, not in Chriſt alone; but in the Father, *of whom*, to uſe the Apoſtle's Words, *the whole Family in Heaven and Earth is named* [x]; and in the Holy Spirit alſo: whoſe Name appears evidently never to have been omitted in Baptiſm, from that remarkable Paſſage [y], where ſome Profeſſors of the Goſpel owning that they were intirely ignorant concerning the Holy Ghoſt, St. *Paul* aſks them, *Unto what then were ye baptized?* And finding it was only *into the Baptiſm of John*, commands them to

[u] John xvii. 11, 12. [w] Rev. ii. 13. [x] Eph. iii. 15.
[y] Acts xix. 1, 2, 3.

be

be now baptized, *into the Name of the Lord Jeſus* [z]. So it is expreſſed: but the foregoing Queſtion fully proves, that the Name of the Holy Ghoſt was uſed likewiſe: from whence it follows, that the Expreſſion, *baptizing into the Name of Chriſt*, wherever we find it in Scripture, is only put for Shortneſs: and that the original Form of Baptiſm was, *In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt:* which accordingly was the conſtant one in the primitive Church.

You ſee then, upon the whole, that as being *baptized into John*'s Baptiſm, was taking his Name, and being called his Diſciple: and as being *baptized into the Name of Paul*, (a Suppoſition, which he himſelf puts [a]) would have been ſetting Him up as our chief Leader and Maſter: ſo when the Scripture ſpeaks of being *baptized into the Name of Chriſt*, the Meaning is, that we avow believing and following Him; and when, more fully, *into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt*, it ſignifies, that we are received into the Number of thoſe, who profeſs, and deſire to be known by the Character of

[z] v. 3, 4, 5. [a] 1 Cor. i. 13.

profeſſing,

profeſſing, Faith and Duty towards the ever-bleſſed Trinity.

2. But wherein more particularly this Faith, which is the Foundation of Duty, conſiſts; and what are the great Articles of it, is the ſecond Point, on which I propoſed to ſpeak: and theſe Things not being explicitly taught in the Form of Baptiſm ſingly, muſt be learned from the reſt of Scripture in Conjunction with it, and profeſſed in Proportion as they are learned. Now the Scripture expreſsly aſſerts, in perfect Conformity with Reaſon, that there is but one God, the Object of our Faith and Adoration: not one ſupreme, and other inferior ones, as the Heathens believed, but one alone. *Hear, O Iſrael, the Lord our God is one Lord*[b]: *Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve*[c]. *I am the Lord, and there is none elſe, there is no God beſides me*[d]: *I am the Lord, that is my Name, and my Glory will I not give to another*[e], ſaith he himſelf. Accordingly St. Paul declares, that *to us* Chriſtians, *there is one God the Father, of whom are all Things*[f]. But then, beſides the ſeveral Orders of created Beings, the ſame

[b] Deut. vi. 4. [c] Deut. vi. 13. Matth. iv. 4. [d] Iſ. xlv. 5. [e] Iſ. xlii. 8. [f] 1 Cor. viii. 6.

Scripture

Scripture as expreſsly mentions his eternal Son and Spirit: the one begotten of him, the other proceeding from him. The diſtinct and full Meaning of theſe Terms we know not: but this, however, they plainly denote, that the Son and Spirit are derived from the Father, in a Manner, whatever it be, each different from the other, and both different from Creation. Accordingly we find aſcribed to both theſe, not only the Names, but the Perfections of God, with Honours and Worſhip incommunicable to any Creature: and while they are evidently diſtinguiſhed from the Father, they are as evidently deſcribed as being one with him. Wherein preciſely this Union and this Diſtinction lies, the Scripture hath not ſaid, and therefore we cannot ſay, any farther than this: that the Union appears to be, not only a Similitude of Will, or of other Powers and Diſpoſitions, but the higheſt poſſible Sameneſs of eſſential Attributes and Properties; for which Reaſon it hath been called an Unity of Eſſence, Nature or Subſtance: and the Diſtinction appears to be, not only a Difference of Names, or of Relations to created Beings, but of Subſiſtence and Action, reſembling in ſome Meaſure, as

deſcribed

deſcribed in Holy Writ, that of different human Agents; on which Account it is ſaid to be a Diſtinction of Perſons. And from all theſe Things put together, we conclude, that we are to believe and worſhip three Perſons, who are one God.

Many other Words and Terms there are, beſides theſe, which have been uſed in ſpeaking of this great Myſtery: ſome of them proper and uſeful, ſerving to expreſs only what the Scripture expreſſes, and to guard it againſt Miſrepreſentations; which therefore we ſhould ever interpret candidly and favourably: others, much better omitted; as indeed all are, that Men employ to give any further Knowledge of the Subject, than God hath given. For in ſuch Caſes, but in this above any, the true Method is, to receive, with the utmoſt Humility and Simplicity of Mind, what is revealed: neither adding, nor diminiſhing, nor one Way or other attempting to make it, either clearer, or darker, than it is. The former we cannot do: the latter we eaſily may, but ſurely ſhould not wiſh to do. Multiplying therefore Phraſes and Reaſonings, either to determine what the divine Oracles have not determined, or to explain away what they

have determined, is on both Hands wrong; and hath often led very great Men into unhappy Errors, and very good Men into fierce Contentions: all which might be avoided, would they but be ſo modeſt, as neither to doubt of what the All-wiſe hath taught, nor pry into what he hath concealed; and ſo charitable, as never without the ſtrongeſt Reaſon to think ill of others, and never for any Reaſon do or wiſh ill to them.

There are certainly, in this wonderful Doctrine, many Things, concerning which, Queſtions may be aſked, which we can only anſwer by confeſſing our Ignorance: and ſome Things, againſt which Objections may be raiſed, that we can ſolve no otherwiſe, than by reminding thoſe, who make them, that ſuch Difficulties muſt be expected, whenever a finite Mind attempts to view an infinite Object. But, though, in the Holy Trinity, there is much, that can by no Means be comprehended fully; which is what we intend to ſay, by calling it *myſterious*, or above Reaſon; (as indeed almoſt every Thing is, in Part, above ours:) yet, in what the Scripture requires us to believe concerning the Holy Trinity, there is nothing, which either cannot be at all underſtood; or

which

which, when underſtood, is abſurd and contrary to Reaſon. Now whatever poſſibly may be true, we are bound, when a Revelation, well atteſted, plainly teaches it, to believe actually is true. For Faith in what God affirms, is unqueſtionably as neceſſary, as Obedience to what he enjoins. And, little as we can ſee in Matters of this high Nature, we may notwithſtanding ſufficiently ſee very important Motives for his Injunction of Faith in this Doctrine: becauſe from the Diſtinction of Perſons in the Trinity, there ariſes a farther Diſtinction of their Relations to us, on which Relations are founded diſtinct Duties on our Parts towards them; and very different from what they would be, if two of them were only Creatures of exalted Rank. The whole Subſtance of Chriſtianity is comprehended in conſidering, and accordingly honouring, (to expreſs it in the well-known Words of our Catechiſm) *God the Father*, as Him, *who hath made us and all the World*; *God the Son*, as Him, *who hath redeemed us and all Mankind*; *God the Holy Ghoſt*, as Him, *who ſanctifieth us and all the elect People of God.* Not but that each Perſon concurs in each of theſe Works: but ſtill, finding in Scripture,

that one is repreſented as more peculiarly and eminently concerned in one of them, and another in another; we juſtly diſtinguiſh the Father, Son, and Spirit, by the diſtinct Offices of Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; and juſtly expreſs the Diſtinction in our Prayers and Praiſes, as well as in our Creed.

Thus, in the Revelation of St. *John*, the Saints above adore the Perſon of the Father in the firſt of theſe Characters. *And the four and twenty Elders fell down before him that ſat on the Throne, and worſhipped him that liveth for ever and ever,—ſaying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive Glory, and Honour, and Power: for thou haſt created all Things; and for thy Pleaſure they are, and were created* [g]. We therefore on Earth, in like Manner, ought to *worſhip, and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker* [h]: to whom we farther owe peculiar Thankſgivings on this Account, that he, according to the Counſel of infinite Wiſdom, was the original Cauſe of our Redemption. For *in this was manifeſted the Love of God towards us, that he ſent his only-begotten Son into the World, that we might live through Him* [i]. *Bleſſed be the God and Father of our*

[g] Rev. iv. 10, 11. [h] Pſ. xcv. 6. [i] 1 John iv. 9.

Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant Mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively Hope[k]. But the actual Accomplishment of this great Design was the unspeakably gracious Work of the second Person, whom therefore we call our Redeemer, and address with Devotions appropriated to his Office. Thus, in the very next Chapter of the same Book of Revelation, we are told by St. *John: The four and twenty Elders fell down before the Lamb, and sung a new Song, saying, Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy Blood, out of every Kindred, and Tongue, and People, and Nation.—And I heard the Voice of many Angels round about the Throne,—saying with a loud Voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory, and Blessing. And every Creature, which is in Heaven, and on the Earth, and under the Earth, heard I, saying, Blessing, and Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto him, that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*[l]. In this universal Acclamation of Praise, our Hearts ought to join with the humblest Gratitude: to reverence him

[k] 1 Pet. i. 3. [l] Rev. v. 8, 9, 11, 12, 13.

continually

continually as the *Lord of all*[m]; and in particular, beſides the holy Ordinance of Baptiſm, to celebrate with the devouteſt Affection, that other ſolemn Rite, which he hath inſtituted, commanding us, *This do in Remembrance of me*[n]. The diſtinct Office of the third Perſon, the Spirit, hath conſiſted from the Beginning, firſt in revealing and confirming the Truths of Religion to Men, from Age to Age, till the Knowledge of them was completed in the New Teſtament; for *holy Men of old ſpake as they were moved by the Holy Ghoſt*[o]: then in diſpoſing their Minds, by the outward Miniſtry of the Word, and the inward Workings of his Grace, to receive and obey them: giving thoſe, who comply with his Motions, Strength againſt Temptation, Comfort under Affliction, Fervency in Prayer, Growth in Goodneſs, reviving Hope, and ſometimes joyful Aſſurance, of divine Favour: All which Operations tending wholly to improve us in Piety and Virtue, which together make up true Sanctity or Holineſs, he is accordingly ſtyled the Sanctifier. And our Duty to him plainly is, to be thankful to him for what he hath done, and pray for what he is ready to

[m] Acts x. 36. [n] Luke xxii. 19. [o] 2 Pet. i. 21.

do, towards our Salvation; never to *grieve* [p] *or do deſpite to* [q] *him* by wilful Sin or Negligence; but to learn from his Inſtructions, and yield to his Influences, that he may abide with us for ever, and make us, as the Apoſtle expreſſes himſelf, *Temples of the Holy Ghoſt* [r].

[p] Eph. iv. 30. [q] Heb. x. 29. [r] 1 Cor. vi. 19.

SERMON II.

MATTH. xxviii. 19, 20.

Go ye therefore, and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt.

Teaching them to obſerve all Things, whatſoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World. Amen.

IN my former Diſcourſe on theſe Words I have ſhewn both what is meant by being baptized *in*, or rather *into the Name* of any one, particularly of *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt*; and what Faith in them that Baptiſm obliges us to profeſs: endeavouring ſo to ſet forth our Chriſtian Belief, as neither to decide concerning what is hidden from us, nor to omit what is made known to us. For *the ſecret Things*

belong unto the Lord our God: but those Things, which are revealed, belong unto us and to our Children for ever; that we may do all the Words of this Law[a]. Let us now therefore go on to the practical Part of Christianity, comprehended under the

Second Branch of the Text, in which our Saviour directs his Apostles, what Duties they were to enjoin Men, in Consequence of their Faith. *Teaching them to observe all Things, whatsoever I have commanded you.*

Now of these, our Duties to the several Persons of the Holy Trinity are so closely connected with our Faith in them, that I thought it most natural to mention them together. And of the rest, it would be impossible at present to specify every one in particular. And therefore I shall only treat of the more general Heads and Divisions of them. By this Commission of our blessed Lord then, the Ministers of the Gospel are bound to teach, and the Professors of the Gospel to observe, the Precepts of Piety, as well as Morality; of revealed Religion, as well as natural; difficult, as well as easy Duties; those of Self-Government, as well

[a] Deut. xxix. 29.

as

as of ſocial Behaviour; *all Things whatſoever he hath commanded*, and nothing elſe.

I. Precepts of Piety, as well as Morality. In ſome Ages of the World the Generality of Perſons, and in all too many, have almoſt intirely diſregarded Virtue, at leaſt ſome Parts of it, while yet they ſeemed very zealous in Religion. That the *Religion* of ſuch *is vain* [b], requires little Proof. Indeed it muſt be, either mere Pretence, or groſs Miſtake. Either they have really none of that Devotion, which they profeſs, or it is Devotion to an [c] *unknown God*. For did they at all apprehend his Nature aright; the Love of him could not but incline them to the Love of whatever was good; and the Fear of him could not but deter them from whatever was evil. Theſe Things are ſo eaſily demonſtrable, and the Miſchiefs of not attending to them have been ſo dreadful; that wherever Knowledge and Liberty have prevailed, ſuch wrong Notions of Duty to our Maker have (amongſt the more conſiderable Part of the World at leaſt,) quickly fallen into the Contempt and Hatred, which they well deſerve. But then, as it is natural for the Warmth of Men to carry them too far; and

[b] James i. 26. [c] Acts xvii. 23.

the Thoughtleſſneſs of Men to confound Matters, which ſhould be diſtinguiſhed: ſo, in our Times, moſt unhappily, Multitudes have run from one Extreme to another; and, not diſcerning the Difference between two of the unlikeſt Things in the World, when well compared, falſe Religion and true, have, in a great Meaſure, if not abſolutely, rejected both together. Declaring in general the higheſt Honour for Virtue, they ſlight and even ridicule Piety: the inward Feeling of it, under the Name of Enthuſiaſm; the outward Marks of it, under that of Superſtition. Yet plainly, if Sentiments of Duty and Affection to our Fellow-Creatures be neceſſary Ingredients in a good Character: Want of them towards our Creator, muſt (where Means of Inſtruction are afforded) be a certain Argument of a bad one. And, if our Regards to our Fellow-Creatures ought to be ſhewn by viſible Tokens, not only that they may be ſenſible of our proper Diſpoſitions, but that by exerciſing them we may improve in them, and others be excited to Imitation: then our Reverence to our Creator ought likewiſe to be manifeſted openly; becauſe, though he ſees the devout Thoughts, that lie hid in our Hearts, yet, by expreſſing them, we ſhall

both

both ſtrengthen them in ourſelves, and ſet an uſeful Example to thoſe around us. Indeed the Connection of religious Duties with moral is ſo very cloſe, that, as the Religion of thoſe is always falſe, who think meanly of Virtue: ſo the Virtue of thoſe is never uniformly, if at all, true, who think meanly of Religion. For the Belief of a God, who obſerves and will recompenſe, being in all Caſes the greateſt, and in ſome the only, Support of right Conduct: they, who either diſbelieve or diſregard him, muſt frequently fall into wrong Conduct, amidſt the various Temptations of Life. And the Truth is, the Generality of thoſe amongſt them, who talk the moſt of Virtue, appear to concern themſelves very little farther about it, than to oppoſe it, in their Talk, to Religion. Such indeed cannot be really, in any Degree, ſerious. But many who, in ſome Reſpects, are ſuch, and imagine they are in all, would aſſuredly find, on a careful Examination, that they are dangerouſly deficient in this Reſpect: and that cultivating and exerting dutiful Affection to the Author of their Being, is not only in itſelf *the firſt and great Commandment*, but hath a moſt powerful Influence on the Practice of that

ſecond,

ſecond, which is *like unto it* [d], and of every other human Obligation.

II. We are bound to obſerve the Precepts of revealed Religion, as well as natural. That God can make known to us many Truths, of which we were ignorant, though greatly intereſted in them, will not ſurely be doubted: for we can make known ſuch very often one to another. And that from theſe Truths correſponding Rules of Behaviour may flow, is equally plain. Thoſe Relations and Duties therefore to our Redeemer and to our Sanctifier, which the holy Scripture alone diſcovers to us, are not, on that Account, at all the leſs real, than thoſe to our Creator, of which Reaſon informs us. Further: as God is the Sovereign of the World, there is no more Room for Queſtion, whether, under the general Laws of his moral Kingdom, he may not eſtabliſh, from Time to Time, particular and different Inſtitutions and Forms of Religion; than whether, under the general Laws of human Society, earthly Sovereigns may not eſtabliſh particular and different Inſtitutions and Forms of Government. And laſtly: As God knows perfectly well, both the Nature of our Circum-

[d] Matth. xxii. 37, &c.

ſtances, and the proper Method of treating us; that he may poſſibly have very important Motives for ſome of his Appointments, of which Motives we can diſcern ſcarce any thing, is much more certain, than that a wiſe Man, well acquainted with any Affair, may perceive many Steps to be fitting in Relation to it, which a weak Man, uninſtructed in it, doth not.

Whatever Precepts then are contained in Revelation, ſince none of them, rightly underſtood, are contrary to Reaſon, it is our indiſpenſable Duty to obſerve them, though ever ſo implicitly, *walking in all the Commandments and Ordinances of the Lord blameleſs* [e]. We know not what we do, when we reject or ſlight any one of them: only this we know, that we diſobey that Authority, which enjoins the Whole: a Conſideration, worthy of being laid ſeriouſly to Heart by all thoſe, (for too many there are,) who, either preſumptuouſly, or thoughtleſsly, neglect or depreciate ſome of the Inſtitutions of Chriſtianity, while they profeſs to reverence others; and, as any Shadow of Argument, or groundleſs Imagination leads them, determine with themſelves, that This they will do, That they will not; This they

[e] Luke i. 6.

will

will look on as a Matter of Moment, That as a Trifle. It cannot be, that any of the Laws of Chriſt, our Lord and Maſter, are to be treated thus. And yet ſome of them are treated thus by ſuch Numbers, (who, notwithſtanding, call themſelves by his Name,) that they muſt be mentioned in particular.

The Sacrament of Baptiſm, the leading Part of our Saviour's Commiſſion in the Text, is not indeed thrown off, but frequently attended with ſcarce common Seriouſneſs. The Obligation of Parents and Maſters to *bring up* thoſe under their Care *in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord*[f], is both cruelly and unwiſely forgotten. The apoſtolical and very uſeful Ordinance of Confirmation, is too often omitted, and ſtill oftener conſidered as an empty Form: private Devotion practiſed, it may be feared, by very few, at leaſt with any Attention: pious Reading and Meditation by fewer ſtill: Family Prayer almoſt intirely laid aſide: and the public Service of God, by ſome avowedly ſcorned, by others, both thought and ſpoken of with a contemptuous Indifference; as if it might well be left to Fancy and Chance, when and how often, or whether almoſt at all, they ſhould

[f] Eph. vi. 4.

conde-

condeſcend to join in that Worſhip of him who made them, which himſelf hath preſcribed. The Day, which he hath directed to be kept holy, is lamentably, and in many Places openly, profaned, not only by the Omiſſion juſt mentioned, but by needleſs worldly Buſineſs, improper Diverſions, and what is yet worſe, Intemperance and Debauchery. Nay, the far greater Part, even of ſuch, as obſerve other Inſtitutions with no ſmall Appearance of Conſcientiouſneſs, aſtoniſhingly overlook, in Spite of continual Admonitions, their Saviour's Injunction of commemorating, at the Holy Table, his dying Love, delivered nearly with his dying Breath. Experience hath proved to a ſhocking Degree, that in Proportion as Diſregard to Duties, peculiarly Chriſtian, increaſes, Diſregard to all Duty increaſes too: and what the End of it will be (unleſs through God's Grace our timely Reformation put a happy End to it) I know not how we can better judge, than by our bleſſed Lord's own Words, which he hath verified ſo dreadfully on thoſe once ſhining Lights, the Churches of *Aſia*, to whom they were primarily directed. *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the firſt*

firſt Works: elſe I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy Candleſtick out of its Place, except thou repent [g].

III. Being bound to whatever Chriſt hath commanded us, we are bound to perform the moſt laborious and unwelcome, as well as the eaſieſt, of his Commands. We may be ſure, he hath enjoined us nothing, but what he will make poſſible, nothing but what he hath a Right, nothing but what he hath Cauſe, to enjoin. And therefore, the Difficulty of his Precepts can never be an Excuſe for not obeying them. Sometimes this Difficulty is but imaginary: and what we apprehend that we cannot do at all, would we but try in a proper Manner, we ſhould do with great Eaſe. Sometimes it is real indeed, but of our own creating. Slight Inclinations have grown, by Indulgence or Negligence, into ſettled Habits: wilful wrong Conduct hath put Obſtacles in the Way of acting right: and then we think it very grievous, that we muſt be at Pains to bring ourſelves out of a Condition, that we needed never have brought ourſelves into. Or, ſuppoſing any Virtue originally hard to practiſe, do we not often obey extremely hard In-

[g] Rev. ii. 5.

junctions

junctions of Men? And why not therefore thoſe of God? Be the Labour ever ſo great; ſtill, both in the Nature of the Thing, and by the Appointment of Heaven, no one can become happy, that doth not become good: and no one is truly good, who purpoſely or negligently lives in the Omiſſion of any Duty, or Commiſſion of any Sin. Difficulty is a Reaſon for nothing, but exerting ourſelves, and applying to God for Help: which whoever doth in earneſt, will find Oppoſition ſerve only to ſtrengthen his Chriſtian Graces by Exerciſe here, and augment the Reward of them for ever hereafter.

IV. We muſt obſerve thoſe Commands, which relate to the Government of ourſelves, no leſs than thoſe which reſpect our Fellow-Creatures. Men are ſtrangely apt to run into Extremes in this Particular. Some, on the Merit of their Abſtinence from unlawful Pleaſures, venture without Scruple to be ill-humoured, hard-hearted, cenſorious, and unjuſt; while ſome again place the whole of a right Character in a gay Kind of good Nature: and, either hurting, as they pretend, Nobody but themſelves; or, however doing others only ſuch Injuries, as they imagine Matter of Merriment; go

almoſt

almoſt whatever Lengths of ſenſual Gratification their Deſires prompt them to. Now theſe latter, far from being the harmleſs People, which they would have the World think them, uſually contribute more, by the unavoidable, and often foreſeen, Conſequences of their Vices, and the Contagion of their Examples, to bring Miſery into private Life, and Diſtreſs, if not Ruin, upon the Public, than almoſt any wicked Perſons, that can be mentioned beſides. But were they, in theſe Reſpects, ever ſo innocent: yet our being rational Creatures, as indiſpenſably binds us to Sobriety, Chaſtity, and Decency, as our being ſocial Creatures doth to Inoffenſiveneſs and Beneficence. A Mind immerſed in Voluptuouſneſs, nay filled with Amuſements and Trifles, and attentive to them only or chiefly, is by no Means in a moral State, and much leſs in a religious one. Our evident Capacity and Formation for higher and better Things, cannot but carry with it a proportionable Obligation, to the Improvement of our Underſtandings in the Knowledge of Truth, and of our Hearts in the Eſteem of Virtue; to the Care of acting worthily and uſefully amongſt our Fellow-Creatures, and qualifying ourſelves for

ſpiritual

ſpiritual Happineſs with our Creator. Thus much even the Light of Nature will teach us. And if Revelation be conſulted; there we ſhall find the ſtrongeſt Cautions, againſt that Fondneſs for ſumptuous Living, Delicacy, and Splendor, which brought the rich Man into the Place of Torment [h]; againſt being *Lovers of Pleaſures, more than Lovers of God* [i]. Scriptures, like theſe, are not deſigned to drive Perſons into unnatural Rigours and Auſterities: but they are deſigned to reſtrain them from that Habit and Study of Self-Indulgence, which being attended perhaps with the Commiſſion of no flagrant Sins, looks to be an allowable Way of conſuming Time; but indeed brings poor Wretches, often by quick Degrees, to intire Forgetfulneſs of God and themſelves, and extinguiſhes all Attention to what deſerves it moſt. This Lethargy of the Mind is the great Danger of a State of Proſperity and Affluence: which therefore, as many as are placed in that State, ſhould continually watch againſt, as being totally contrary to a Spirit of Religion; and remember, that whoever ſo *liveth in Pleaſure*, as to live to it, *is dead while he liveth* [k]:

[h] Luke xvi. 19, *&c.* [i] 2 Tim. iii. 4. [k] 1 Tim. v. 6.

dead to all the Purpoſes of Chriſtianity here, and all the Hopes of Felicity hereafter.

V. Our Saviour's Direction, that all Nations be *taught to obſerve* every thing *which he hath commanded*, implies a Prohibition of teaching any thing in his Name, which he hath not commanded, either perſonally while on Earth, or by the holy Spirit of Truth after his Aſcenſion. For where his Commiſſion ends, there the Powers of thoſe, to whom he gave it, end alſo. Still, in Matters left undetermined, or not fully determined by him, Men of Knowledge may ſignify their Opinion, Men of Prudence may ſuggeſt their Advice, and both are to be regarded in a proper Degree. Superiors may likewiſe interpoſe their Authority, ſo far as public Order and Peace require; and, in all Things lawful, others are bound to ſubmit to them. But no Man, or Number of Men, may preſume to ſet up their own Judgement, or their own Will, for a Law of Chriſt: or add a ſingle Article, as a neceſſary one, to that Rule of *Faith* and Practice, which was *once delivered unto the Saints* [1]. Even St. *Paul* himſelf hath on one Occaſion accurately diſtinguiſhed be-

[1] Jude v. 3.

tween

tween what he, and what the Lord in Perſon, ſpoke [m]; between Points in which he *had* an expreſs *Commandment*, and Points in which he *gave his Judgement, as one that had obtained Mercy to be faithful* [n]: that is, in the Truſt of the Apoſtleſhip. And if ſuch a Perſon was thus careful, much more ought the Miniſters of Religion in theſe later Ages, who can have no certain Acquaintance with it, but from his Writings and the reſt of Scripture, be ſolicitous not to *preach any other Goſpel, than that they have received* [o]; nor *build, on the Foundation of Jeſus Chriſt*, Superſtructures that will not abide the Trial [p], *teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men* [q]. They, who aſſume this Power, uſurp a Dominion over their Fellow-Servants, to which only their Maſter in Heaven hath a Right: and they who obey this Power, ſo far *worſhip God in vain, who hath never required this at their Hands* [r].

I have now gone through the ſecond Part of the Text: the Duties, which the Apoſtles and their Succeſſors were to enjoin. And therefore I proceed to ſet before you,

III. The Protection and Happineſs, of which

[m] 1 Cor. vii. 10. 12. [n] v. 25. [o] Gal. i. 9.
[p] 1 Cor iii. 11, 12, 13. [q] Matth. xv. 9. [r] Iſ. i. 12.

both they who faithfully preach the Goſpel, and they who ſincerely embrace it, may be aſſured. *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the End of the World. Amen.*

Amongſt Men, chuſing to be with any one is not only a natural Conſequence of having a Regard for him, but, on many important Occaſions, a neceſſary Means of ſhewing that Regard to his Advantage. In Condeſcenſion therefore to common Language, God, though preſent every where, is deſcribed in holy Writ as peculiarly drawing nigh unto, being, and dwelling with, thoſe, who by a Temper and Conduct of Piety and Virtue intitle themſelves to his Love and fatherly Care: whereas he is repreſented as departing from Perſons of a contrary Character, not vouchſafing to look upon them, or beholding them afar off, till he returns to execute Judgement on them. Of this Kind is the Manner of Speech uſed in the Text: where our bleſſed Lord, being about to leave the World, and go unto the Father, tells his Followers, that though his viſible and bodily Preſence was to be withdrawn very ſoon, he ſhould be ſtill as really preſent upon Earth, as ever: not only ſeeing, but watching, directing, and defending them continually. And therefore,

fore, notwithſtanding St. *Matthew* thought fit to abſtain from ſubjoining in his Goſpel any Words of his own to theſe moſt ſolemn ones of our Saviour, yet his Aſcent into Heaven is almoſt as well underſtood by them, as if it had been expreſsly related.

This gracious Promiſe was doubtleſs immediately, and in the firſt Place, made to the Apoſtles. But as the Uſe, for which it was made, is perpetual; and the Term, for which it is expreſſed to be made, cannot poſſibly be confined to themſelves; but muſt ſignify either, as we tranſlate it, *to the End of the World*, or *to the End of the Goſpel Age*, which is to laſt as long as the World; it muſt neceſſarily be extended to thoſe, who ſhould at any Time ſucceed the Apoſtles in teaching the Faith and Duties of Chriſtianity. And ſince the Preſence of Chriſt with the Teachers of his Religion is deſigned for the Benefit of thoſe, who are taught it: therefore all ſuch, in all Ages, have a Share in the Aſſurance of the Text. Accordingly, in many Places of Scripture, the Preſence, not only of the Son of God, but of the Father and Holy Spirit, is promiſed to every true Believer without Exception. St. *Paul* declares, *If any Man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is*

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none of his [s]. *And Chriſt himſelf declares, If a Man love me,—my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our Abode with him* [t].

If then, as the Church of *Rome* pretends, ſuch Expreſſions as theſe convey a Promiſe of Infallibility, or Security of not departing from the right Faith, to their Church, or any Perſon or Perſons in it; they convey the ſame to every Church, and every Perſon in it. But our Saviour's Declaration is, not that any one or more Churches may not, if they will, intirely throw off the Faith; and even all Churches, as well as all Men, fall both into many Errors and many Sins: but that this ſhall never happen through his forſaking them, but their forſaking him: and that, how great ſoever the Apoſtacy of the latter Times may be, (as St. *Paul* hath foretold it ſhould be a very grievous one [v];) how much ſoever at any Time the Church of Chriſt may be obſcured, it ſhall never be extinguiſhed: for it muſt continue to the End of the World, ſince he hath promiſed to *be with it* to the End of the World. In different Ages he is preſent to it in different Manners, as the Circumſtances of

[s] Rom. viii. 9. [t] John xiv. 23. [v] Tim. iv. 1.

each

each require. His Apoſtles he directed by Inſpiration into all Truth: and ſtrengthened them with Power to work Miracles in Confirmation of it. When Religion, by their Means, was known and proved ſufficiently, theſe extraordinary Effects of his Preſence gradually ceaſed: but thoſe, which remained ſtill needful, were ſtill experienced. And to this Day, wherever his Miniſters teach Men to believe and do what he hath commanded, there *he is alway with them:* and *wherever two or three* of his Diſciples *are gathered together in his Name, there he is in the Midſt of them* [w]: protecting his whole Church, and every Member of it, outwardly againſt their temporal Enemies to ſuch Degree, as infinite Wiſdom ſees to be fit; and inwardly againſt their ſpiritual ones, ſo that nothing, but their own wilful Sins and Perſeverance in them, ſhall hazard the Salvation of any one of them. But ſo far as Men allow themſelves to teach, believe, or practiſe, contrary to his Commands, they forfeit their Title to his gracious Preſence, which evidently depends on their Obedience to thoſe Commands. And conſequently no Set of Men in the World have a Right to argue, as the *Ro-*

[w] Matth. xviii. 20.

maniſts would fain do; that Chriſt hath promiſed to be with his Church for ever; and therefore their Church, or the Majority of the whole Church, can teach only what he appointed they ſhould. But ours is a very juſt Way of arguing; that we teach what Chriſt appointed we ſhould, and therefore we are a Part of his Church, with which he hath promiſed to be for ever. For that our Doctrines are Catholic, however the *Romaniſts* have ſtolen the Name, we are bold to ſay, and fully able to prove: on this Account we have nothing to fear. Could we but ſay as much of our Lives too, then all were well.

But alas, though they have little Cauſe on Compariſon to reproach us in this Reſpect, we have much Cauſe to reproach ourſelves. The Number of profeſſed Chriſtians amongſt us indeed is large: yet even that is leſſening. But the Number of ſuch as are truly Chriſtians, and behave like Chriſtians—What ſhall we ſay of this? May God, *who commanded the Light to ſhine out of Darkneſs*, cauſe the Light of his Goſpel to *ſhine* more effectually *into the Hearts of Men* [x], and brighten the very dark Proſpect there is before us concerning ſpiritual Matters;

[x] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

that

that we may *know, at leaſt in this our Day, the Things which belong to our Peace* [y], our preſent and future Happineſs. But what others will do, is for them to conſider: and what ſhall be the Conſequences of Mens Doings, is for God to appoint. Let us only look to our own Souls; that in the Midſt of a bad World we be, as we ought, innocent, prudent, and exemplary; that we watch over thoſe, who are under our Care, and warn others as we have Opportunity; that, by openly profeſſing the Goſpel of Chriſt, we encourage the Profeſſion of it; and, by adorning our Profeſſion with a ſuitable Conduct, do Honour to it. Provided we behave thus; let others behave as they pleaſe, and the Event be what it will to them, and to all, in temporal Concerns; to us the final Event however ſhall be good. Chriſtianity began with a very ſmall Number: and were it to be reduced to an equally ſmall one again, we might take the ſame Comfort ſtill, which our Saviour gave his Diſciples at firſt: *Fear not, little Flock: for it is your Father's good Pleaſure to give you the Kingdom* [z]. *The Kingdoms of this Earth* we have Cauſe to hope will yet, in due Time, notwithſtanding all Appearances to the contrary,

[y] Luke xix. 42. [z] Luke xii. 32.

become

become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chriſt [a], in a much ampler Manner than they have hitherto been. But the Kingdom of Heaven, *God, who cannot lie* [b], hath, in the plaineſt Terms, promiſed to the faithful Diſciples of his Son. And all who have ſecured his Preſence with them here, by a Life of Religion and Virtue, ſhall aſſuredly reign with him for ever hereafter in thoſe bleſſed *Manſions of his Father's Houſe*, whither *he is gone to prepare a Place for us, and will come again, and receive us unto himſelf, that where he is, there we may be alſo* [c].

[a] Rev. xi. 15. [b] Tit. i. 2. [c] John xiv. 2, 3.

SER-

SERMON III.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and ſin not.

THE Nature of Almighty God being abſolutely perfect and uncompounded, neither Paſſions nor Affections, properly ſo called, have any Place in it: but his Actions all proceed from uniform and unmixed Regard to Truth and Equity. His Creatures, incapable of attaining to be in any Reſpect what he is, fall ſhort of it in different Degrees, from thoſe Spirits above, that approach neareſt to pure Intelligence, though infinitely diſtant from it, to the loweſt Inhabitants of Earth, which have no other Guide than Appetites and Inſtincts. Man is of a middle Rank; and partakes, almoſt equally, of inferior Principles to excite and move him, where Reaſon would be inſufficient,

ficient, and of Reaſon to direct and reſtrain theſe, where elſe they would take a wrong Courſe, or exceed proper Bounds. Our Proportion therefore of lower Faculties, though a Proof that we are very imperfect, contributes to our being on the Whole leſs ſo, than we ſhould have been; and a due Regulation of them by the higher, will make us continually more perfect than we are. This is the great Employment allotted us by our Maker here on Earth: which indeed we often find much Pain in attempting, but ſhould ſuffer much greater by neglecting, and ſhall be rewarded eternally for performing.

Now, according to the ſeveral Kinds of our inward Diſpoſitions, the moral Diſcipline of them varies. Some, as the benevolent Sort, require chiefly to be ſtrengthened: ſome again, as the iraſcible, to be kept in Subjection. And indeed our Anger is ſo hard to be governed, and the Cauſe of ſuch dreadful Evils, when it is not governed; that no Wonder, if great and wiſe Men have ſeemed to ſpeak of it, as totally and eſſentially vicious; as requiring to be, not only moderated but rooted out. Yet, as thoſe Parts of the outward Frame of Nature, which have produced at any Time the moſt frightful Effects,

fects, appear notwithſtanding, on due Inquiry, beneficial Conſtituents of that Whole, which the Creator originally pronounced to be good: let us not condemn, without Reſerve, this Part of our inward Frame; which he hath planted in our Breaſts, otherwiſe it had never exiſted there; and which, in Condeſcenſion to our Underſtandings, he hath aſcribed to himſelf.

Reſentment is, in its primitive Nature, a juſt and generous Movement of the Mind, expreſſing that Diſpleaſure againſt ill Actions, which they deſerve: and, in our Hearts at leaſt, ſuch Diſapprobation of what is wrong ſeems inſeparably connected with approving what is right. From this Principle, applied to ourſelves, we feel a Scorn of Baſeneſs and Vice, that prompts us to reject it with Diſdain, when we are tempted to it: or a conſequent Self-Diſlike, if we have fallen under the Temptation, which doth not eaſily allow us any Reſt, till we have returned to our Duty. The ſame Principle, pointed towards our Fellow-Creatures, deters them from enterpriſing Wickedneſs, and invigorates us to reſiſt it: or, if it be already committed, ſtirs us up to ſet before them the Offenſiveneſs of their Conduct in ſo ſtrong a Light, as may induce them to reform it. And

thus

thus Anger, though it designs to give Uneasiness, is so very different from Hatred, as to be often the best Proof of Love. But when just Indignation cannot amend the faulty, then it comes in properly to punish them: to counterbalance that excessive Tenderness, to which, however amiable, it would in some Cases be a fatal Weakness to yield, and support us in the painful Work of *executing Wrath on him that doth Evil* [d].

Thus useful and important is this Passion: by which our Saviour himself was occasionally moved, as when he *was much displeased* with his Disciples [e], and *looked round about on the Jews with Anger, being grieved for the Hardness of their Hearts* [f]. He hath declared indeed, *that whosoever is angry with his Brother without a Cause, shall be in Danger of the Judgement* [g]: but that very Limitation implies, that there are Causes, for which we may *do well to be angry* [h]. Or even were his Threatening originally unlimited, as in some Copies it is; yet the Reason of the Case, his own Example, and other Texts of Scripture, oblige us to understand him only of the unjust Kinds of

[d] Rom. xiii. 4. [e] Mark x. 14. [f] Mark iii. 5.
[g] Matth. v. 22. [h] Jonah iv. 9.

Anger: which are ſo much commoner than the allowable, that they have almoſt appropriated the Name, and turned it to an ill Meaning. Whence perhaps it is, that the Stoic Philoſophers condemn this Paſſion in the moſt general Terms [i], while yet they not only allow it to be uſeful to thoſe, in whom Reaſon ſingly hath not ſufficient Force [k], but expreſsly tolerate, in their ideal perfectly wiſe Man, ſuch gentler Commotions of Mind, and Reſemblances of Anger, as are in Reality moderate Degrees of it [l]. And, (which deſerves much greater Attention), St. *Paul*, who within a few Verſes of the Text hath commanded *all Wrath and Anger to be put away from* [m] Chriſtians, gives, notwithſtanding, the permiſſive Direction in it, *Be ye angry, and ſin not.*

The Reſult then muſt be, that this Paſſion is indeed a lawful one; but very neceſſary, and very hard, to be kept within due Bounds; which

[i] Thus Cicero, who profeſſes in his Offices, l. 1. c. 2. chiefly to follow the Stoics, blames the Peripatetics, c. 25. for praiſing Anger, as given us by Nature for our Good, and ſaith it is to be avoided in all Caſes. But he is ſpeaking only concerning Caſes of Puniſhment. However, he forbids it alſo in Reproofs, c. 38.

[k] Utile eſt eum uti motu animi, qui uti ratione non poteſt, Cic. Tuſc. Diſp. l. 4. § 25. Ed. Davies.

[l] Sentiet [ſapiens] levem quendam tenuemque motum—umbras Affectuum. Sen. de Ira. l. 1. c. xvi. P. 13. Ed. Lipſ. Vid. et. l. 2.

[m] v. 31.

Conſidera-

Conſiderations recommend the following Method in diſcourſing upon it.

I. To deſcribe the due Bounds, with the common Exceſſes, of Anger.

II. To diſſuade from ſuch Exceſſes.

III. To direct how they may be avoided.

I. To deſcribe the due Bounds, with the common Exceſſes, of Anger.

Now the proper Bound for all Paſſion, is Reaſon. And we are then only moved by our Affections as we ought, when they excite us to what our Underſtandings on Reflection approve. But becauſe a Rule ſo general is not ſufficiently inſtructive, I ſhall enlarge on the ſeveral Particulars comprehended under it, which are ſpecified by the Philoſopher, in his *Ethics*, thus, that *He, who is angry, only on ſuch Occaſions as he ought, and with ſuch Perſons as he ought, and in ſuch Manner, and at ſuch Time, and for ſuch Continuance, as he ought, deſerves Praiſe in the Exerciſe of this Paſſion*[n].

1. On ſuch Occaſions as he ought. What theſe are, hath already in ſome Meaſure appeared. Were they, with whom we have to do, conſtantly virtuous and wiſe, there

[n] Ariſtot. Eth. Nicom. l. iv. c. 5.

would

would be no Occaſion. But now their Tranſgreſſions againſt God, our Fellow-Creatures, and ourſelves, furniſh, alas, but too many. When our Maker, whom we ought to reverence and love with our whole Souls, is diſhonoured; when his Laws and the Sanctions of them (the Ground-work of all Security and all Comfort) are inſulted; ſurely it is Cauſe not only of Grief, but Indignation. When the helpleſs are oppreſſed, the well-meaning circumvented, Innocence aſperſed or ſeduced, Faith broken, Kindneſs requited with ill Uſage, or public Good ſacrificed to private Views, we both may, and muſt (if we have any Sympathy with our Kind) feel our Spirit riſe in their Behalf. And though we can neither interpoſe to aſſiſt all that ſuffer, nor permit our Tempers to be ruffled as often as Injuſtice is committed upon Earth; yet in all proper Ways we ought to ſhew, that we ſtrongly diſlike all ſuch Things: and it is an ill Sign, when Perſons are indifferent in the Caſes of others, and will ſtand up for no one's Intereſts, but their own.

Wrongs done to ourſelves we are all ſo apt to reſent, at leaſt enough, that it may ſeem needleſs, and even dangerous, to ſay any Thing of theſe, as one lawful Occaſion for Anger.

But the Truth muſt be acknowledged, that this Paſſion being given us, in a great Meaſure, for our own Defence, we may innocently exert a competent Degree of it for that Purpoſe. Nor can we help, generally ſpeaking, being a little more moved at our own Injuries and Sufferings, than thoſe of others; becauſe we cannot but have a livelier Senſe of them; and the Emotion of Mind, which proceeds from that Senſe, muſt bear ſome Proportion to it.

One Thing more to be obſerved is, that though Faults are the only juſt Ground of Reſentment; and the greater they are, the more the Ground: yet, when they do not amount to Crimes, but are only Neglects or Tranſgreſſions of ſome ſmaller Obligation; ſtill, ſince a great deal of Inconvenience in Life ariſes, even from theſe Inſtances of wrong Behaviour; they warrant and require ſuch lower Marks of our Diſpleaſure, eſpecially when the culpable are placed under our Inſpection, as may be requiſite for their Amendment.

And now it might well be hoped, that a ſufficient Latitude was given to this neceſſary Evil, the Exerciſe of Anger. But theſe are

narrow

narrow Bounds for a Paſſion, which, if let looſe, will admit of none. We can be angry with Perſons, not only for their Faults, but their good Qualities and Accompliſhments, when they excel, or come too near, Us or our Favourites: not only for doing amiſs, but for doing their Duty, if it interfere with any of our Deſigns or Humours. Nay, we can be angry with them for having done their Duty to us; done the kindeſt Thing they could for us, reminded us of our Failings, though in a friendly Way; or ſhewn themſelves in any Inſtance more concerned for us, than we are for ourſelves. We can be angry with Perſons, even when they have done us Kindneſſes; for not doing us ſuch great ones, or not ſo ſoon, or not in ſuch a Manner, as we would have had them: though perhaps they were not bound to do us any. And we can be extremely angry with them for having any Degree of Regard to their own Intereſts, when ours are concerned: firſt looking upon ourſelves as all the World, and the reſt of Mankind as nothing; then fired with the utmoſt Indignation, that this ſhould be diſputed.

But in leſſer Matters, we can be angry with Men even for their natural Tempers, when

they happen to be more gravely, or more chearfully, or any Way differently, turned from our own: for their not liking the ſame Employments or Amuſements, their not falling into the ſame Opinions and Ways of thinking, ſometimes on the moſt trifling Subjects; nay, for not perceiving and acknowledging immediately the Strength of an Argument, or the Weight of an Authority.

Again, we can be angry for the unkind Words or Actions, to which we ourſelves have given the Provocation: and will make no Allowances for little Unreaſonableneſſes in others, where we have, perhaps by great ones, ſet the Pattern, and thrown the Temptation in their Way. We can be angry at thoſe who are employed by us, for miſtaking or not ſucceeding in Caſes, where they have done as well as ever they could, and certainly did not contrive to be ignorant or fail on Purpoſe to vex us. We can be angry at them for mere accidental Misfortunes in our Affairs; Things, which were not provided againſt, becauſe they were not to be expected; or which a reaſonable Degree of Care proved inſufficient to provide againſt; or, it may be, which all the Care in the World could not have prevented.

vented. Nay, in our idleſt Diverſions, we can be as vehemently diſcompoſed, as about the moſt important Buſineſs. And, in the general Courſe of our Behaviour, we can be impatient about every Thing, if we have been made uneaſy about any Thing: and quite out of Humour, perhaps for a conſiderable Time together, without either having, or almoſt thinking we have, any Manner of Provocation to it. Indeed ſomething of this, in too many, ſeems conſtitutional: and, ſo far as it is, ought to have Allowances made for it by every one, except thoſe who are liable to it. But they themſelves cannot reflect too ſeriouſly, how often and how much they make all about them ſuffer for no Cauſe at all; and thoſe moſt, whom they ought leaſt: how ſtrangely and wildly unreaſonable they are, when under the Power of this bad Spirit: and how firmly they are obliged to watch againſt it continually, and free themſelves, when ſeized by it, as ſoon as poſſibly they can.

In all theſe Inſtances, Anger is ſo evidently unjuſt, that happily no Pretence can be made for indulging it. But there are others, in which, Faults having been really committed, a Plea for reſenting is really furniſhed; and

yet, if we reſolve to act rightly and wiſely, no Reſentment at all muſt be ſhewn or entertained. We have not been received perhaps with the good Breeding, or treated with the Regard or good Humour, that we might expect: Expreſſions, not ſo prudent or obliging, have dropt from Perſons in Relation to us: Things, in which we meant no Harm, have been taken wrong: Our Deſires and Inclinations have not been conſulted, when they ought: Our Opinion or Recommendation hath been too little attended to: Our Advice or Directions too little obſerved: or ſome one or another of a thouſand Matters of this Sort hath happened. And doubtleſs every one of them, ſuppoſing the Fact to have been as we imagine, is a Fault: and, though of a ſlighter Sort, ſhould be carefully avoided by thoſe, with whom we live; and, let me add, by ourſelves too. But, alas, they with whom we live, and we ourſelves too, are Creatures, naturally ſubject to ſuch Faults. Indiſcretions and Thoughtleſsneſs, odd Humours and Perverſeneſs, little Partialities and Prejudices, ever were and will be amongſt Men, even the better Kind of Men. And therefore what can be done? Either we muſt all give and take

Offence almoſt every Hour of our Lives; or we muſt be content to make mutual Allowances, and put good Conſtructions on Things: wink at what had better not be ſeen; forget as ſoon as poſſible, what we could not help ſeeing; and teach thoſe by our Example, who, we think, have need to learn, friendly Diſpoſitions, and reſpectful Behaviour. This is the only Way of mending Matters: and ſhameful as it is to our Species, half the Uneaſineſſes, that we feel in Life, proceed from our not taking it.

2. The next Part of the Rule before-mentioned is, that we be angry only with ſuch Perſons as we ought.

And here immediately occurs a criminal Uſe of this Paſſion, almoſt too ſhocking to mention: I mean, when we are angry with our Maker. For againſt whom elſe is it, that our Diſpleaſure is pointed, when we murmur at the Diſtribution of Things here, either becauſe our own Condition is leſs agreeable than we would have it, or that of others more proſperous, than we imagine they deſerve? The former is direct Rebellion of the Heart againſt the Diſpoſitions of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs: an Arrogance, which in Creatures otherwiſe innocent would be monſtrous;

and how much more ſo in miſerable Sinners! The latter indeed would appear a virtuous Concern at the Encouragement, which frequent Succeſs gives to Wickedneſs and Unworthineſs. Nor can it be doubted, but we have Cauſe, often to be ſorry, and ſometimes to be angry, with thoſe around us, when this happens through their Fault. And yet indulging either of theſe Diſpoſitions too far, will reduce us to a very uncomfortable and very blameable State of Mind. But to be provoked, that God ſuffers Men to act thus, is claiming to govern the World in his Stead: whoſe Abhorrence of Sin, and of Diſproportion, we ought to conſider, is infinitely greater than ours can be: and therefore if, for good and wiſe Reaſons he thinks fit to bear with it, well may we do ſo too; and wait with Patience for the appointed Time, when every ſeeming Irregularity ſhall appear to have joined in producing the moſt beautiful Order. *Fret not thyſelf becauſe of the ungodly, neither be thou envious againſt the Evil-doers. Leave off from Wrath, and let go Diſpleaſure: elſe ſhalt thou be moved to do Evil. Hold thee ſtill in the Lord, and abide patiently upon him* [o]. *For ſurely there is an End, and thine Expectation ſhall not be cut off* [p].

[o] Pſ. xxxvii. 1, 8, 7. [p] Prov. xxiii. 18.

But

But as Anger againſt our Maker is impious, againſt ſome of our Fellow-Creatures alſo it is highly improper: thoſe particularly, under whoſe Authority we are; and all, in ſome Meaſure, whoſe Rank is higher than our own. Of them, beyond others, we ought not without ſtrong Reaſons even to think ill, much leſs to blame them openly, and leaſt of all to their Faces. But if ſome extraordinary Occaſion ſhould happen to require it, their Station abſolutely demands, that we ſuppreſs much of that Roughneſs of Manner, and familiar Warmth of Expoſtulation, which perhaps towards Equals might not be unfit. For he, who is angry and finds Fault, aſſumes a Kind of Superiority for the Time: which Inferiors ought rarely to do, and with great Moderation, if at all; though doubtleſs in gentler Terms, they may freely repreſent whatever concerns them.

Another Sort of Perſons, exempted from all Heat of Reſentment, and therefore certainly of Reproof, are our Benefactors and our Friends. Where we have received Favours, it would be very hard to let a few Unkindneſſes, becauſe they came laſt, blot out every Thing that went before; and move us to ſpeak or think with

with the ſame Severity, as we would of others. Nothing, but groſs and repeated Provocations, ought to have this Effect. And we ſhould be extremely backward to imagine, that they, whom we have ſeen taking Pleaſure to do us Good, deſign us any Harm. Then as to our Friends: the Eſteem, which we have entertained for them, ſurely muſt be founded on Merit ſufficient to ſhelter a Number of leſſer Faults from angry Notice. Friendſhip implies a tacit Covenant of mutual Forbearance: without which it would be in Danger of breaking every Day. It permits indeed, and ſometimes requires, Remonſtrances to be made: but never without ſome weighty Cauſe; and always with ſuch Gentleneſs, and evident Proofs of cordial good Will, as may, if poſſible, draw cloſer thoſe Bonds, which nothing but the laſt Neceſſity ſhould untie. And even then, having once been Friends is a powerful Reaſon, both of Prudence and Conſcience, to reſtrain us from ever becoming Enemies.

Others are privileged againſt our Anger upon any particular Miſbehaviour, by the general Goodneſs of their Character and Conduct. We are all ſo far from Perfection, that whoever intends, and acts right in the main, merits an Eſteem for it, that ſhould cover a Multitude

titude of ſmaller Offences, or however greatly moderate our Diſpleaſure at them. And indeed, ſhewing worthy Perſons, in the mildeſt Way, that they have done amiſs, will give them a Concern, that needs no Aggravation.

But many, who are more liable to Faults, muſt yet, on Account of their natural Diſpoſitions be tenderly uſed. Some cannot ſupport any Harſhneſs of Treatment, but ſink under it immediately. Some again, Anger, though not exceſſive, ſerves only to exaſperate. They will readily enough yield to calm, ſoft Repreſentations: but are impatient of Rebuke. To ſuch therefore we ſhould condeſcend a little: and think it ſufficient Amends, that we are almoſt ſure of prevailing on them by ſuch Means, as (if we have any good Nature,) will be far the moſt agreeable to ourſelves. But there are likewiſe, it muſt be owned, People in the World, whom it is eaſy to make worſe by rough Uſage, and not eaſy to make better by any other. That theſe deſerve to have their Tempers much conſulted, cannot be ſaid. But ſtill, partly from Charity and partly from Diſcretion, we muſt treat them in the Method, by which they are likelieſt to prove tractable: and, reſolving firſt, to have as little to do with them as we can;

endeavour

endeavour to get over what we muſt have to do with them, as quietly as we are able.

There is alſo a great Variety, not only in Tempers, but in Underſtandings and Abilities, which ought to be conſidered on this Occaſion. We paſs by many Faults in Children without Anger, if we are at all conſiderate: becauſe they know not, as yet, the Rules of Behaviour; or, through the Levity, incident to their Age, are turned aſide from recollecting them. Now, for the ſame Reaſon, ſuch of riper Years, as either by Nature have leſs Readineſs, or Accuracy, or Sedateneſs; or, from their Education leſs Acquaintance with Propriety, or the Cuſtoms of the World, ſhould in Proportion be exempted from Blame, when they miſbehave; eſpecially in ſmall Points, and ſuch as are beyond their Reach, or out of their Way. Beſides, Men cannot be always attentive to every Part of what they do know. And ſome have conſtitutionally ſo uncommon a Share of Thoughtleſsneſs, that, with the ſame, nay, much more Deſire and Pains, than others, to be exact and punctual, they appear to be ſingularly negligent. Theſe evidently need Compaſſion; and Severity to them would be barbarous. Now and then indeed a little Chiding

may

may be neceſſary for the Cure of their Infirmity; but it ought never to be more than is neceſſary, and always intermixed with Expreſſions of Encouragement.

Thus you have ſeen, who are the leaſt fit Objects of our Diſpleaſure: after which it will be uſeful to ſpecify, who are the moſt fit; and may allowably have much greater Liberties taken with them by us, than commonly are. I mean ourſelves: of whom we probably know full as great Miſdemeanors, and from whom we have certainly received much greater Injuries, than from any one elſe; over whom alſo we have the largeſt Authority, and are the moſt indiſpenſably bound to exerciſe it. Yet even here it is poſſible to be guilty of Exceſs. For Anger muſt aim at Good, when directed againſt ourſelves, no leſs than if it were againſt any other Perſon: and is always faulty, when it tends to our Harm; even were it no further Harm, than diſcompoſing us beyond Reaſon. And ſome want to be cautioned in the ſtrongeſt Manner, at Times, to beware of immoderate Self-Diſlike, becauſe it may urge them to the raſheſt and moſt fatal Extremities. But Self-Indulgence is infinitely the commoner Failing: and therefore the general Rule muſt ever be to preach

preach up due Rigour in this Caſe; for due Tenderneſs will ſeldom be forgotten. Here then we may well employ that ſuperfluous Warmth of Spirit, which we are apt to turn quite another Way; and ſhall never employ it better, than to correct its own Exorbitances: that, ſo ſpending our Diſpleaſure upon our own unjuſt Vehemence, we may *put on* towards all our Brethren, (and every human Creature is ſuch,) *Bowels of Mercies, Kindneſs, Humbleneſs of Mind, Meekneſs, Long-ſuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,—even as Chriſt hath forgiven us:—and let the Peace of God rule in our Hearts, to the which we are alſo called in one Body* [q].

[q] Col. iii. 12, 13. 15.

SERMON IV.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and ſin not.

IN a former Diſcourſe on theſe Words, after proving, that Anger is a lawful Paſſion, but a very dangerous one, I propoſed,

I. To deſcribe its due Bounds, with the common Exceſſes of it.

II. To diſſuade from ſuch Exceſſes.

III. To direct how they may be avoided.

Now in general the Bounds of every Paſſion are thoſe, which Reaſon, ſufficiently enlightened, preſcribes. And the particular Bounds, which it preſcribes to this Paſſion, are, as I have already obſerved, well enumerated in the Philoſopher's Rule: that *he who is angry, only on ſuch Occaſions, and with ſuch Perſons, and in ſuch Manner, and at ſuch Time, and for ſuch Conti-*

Continuance, as he ought, deſerves Praiſe in the Exerciſe of this Faculty. On the two firſt of theſe Heads therefore, the Occaſions and Objects of our Anger, I have already enlarged: and, as the proper ones will be almoſt ſure to be remembered, and the improper ones are much too many to be ſpecified again, I ſhall proceed, without any Repetition of either, to the following Part of the Rule, which is

III. That we be angry only in ſuch Manner as we ought. This comprehends both the Degree, to which our Diſpleaſure may allowably riſe, and the Inſtances in which it may be fitly expreſſed.

There is a Poſſibility of being leſs angry than we ſhould. Our Senſe of wrong Actions may be too faint: and by taking, in Conſequence of this, but a ſlight Notice of them, we may confirm the faulty in a bad Courſe, inſtead of deterring them from it. And eſpecially, when their Faults do us no Harm, whatever they may do to others or themſelves, we are often very backward either to expreſs or feel any Reſentment, even where it is our peculiar Duty. But if, while they injure others, they ſerve us; far from being diſpleaſed, we are very apt to defend and encourage them. Yet

there

there are ſome in the World, whom a generous Ardor of Mind occaſionally diſcompoſes too much, on ſeeing Injuſtice done to their Fellow-Creatures. But theſe are rare. It is in our own Caſes uſually, that we are inclined to Exceſs: and in them our Danger is very great. To avoid it therefore, we ſhould, all of us, frequently reflect, that our Paſſions being only given us for Auxiliaries, to ſupply the Imperfection of our higher Principles; if they move us enough to ſet us upon acting right, it ſuffices; and if they move us more than is requiſite for that End, it will commonly be too much. Where we properly can, the very Appearance of Diſpleaſure ſhould be avoided: for, though it be a Method of Cure, yet, being a diſagreeable one, if we have Recourſe to it without Need, we treat our Patient ill. And, even where we muſt ſhew ourſelves offended, this may very well be done, indeed beſt of all, without allowing ourſelves to be inwardly diſturbed. For thus, at the ſame Time that we preſerve a due Authority over thoſe, with whom we are concerned, we ſhall keep our own Temper in a State of Tranquillity, and fit for whatever lies before us. In Matters of Moment, it is not always in our Power to be abſolutely

calm: but this Conſideration ſhould increaſe our Care not to be agitated too much. For he, who is angry more than he hath Cauſe, is ſo far *angry without a Cauſe*. And therefore we muſt have Regard, both to the Proportion of the Fault, and our Right to take Notice of it. For a Perſon may deſerve a great deal of Anger, and yet deſerve little or none from us.

Exact Determinations indeed of this Proportion are hard to give: and probably would do Harm, if they could eaſily be given. For, were the Limits of lawful Anger in every Caſe preciſely known, moſt People would venture without Scruple to the utmoſt Extent of them; and ſo of Courſe be hurried beyond them: whereas the Difficulty of diſcerning exactly where the Tranſgreſſion begins, is a ſtrong Caution to ſtop at a ſafe Diſtance from it. But inſtead of thinking thus, we commonly conclude, that ſince Anger may juſtly riſe according to the Provocation, and much of it is daily ſhewn about ſmall Things, any Degree whatever is defenſible in great ones. Now evidently this Reaſoning ought to be inverted as follows: only a moderate Reſentment being permitted us, where the Offence

fence is ever ſo heinous, hardly the ſlighteſt ought to be expreſſed, where it is but little.

And though we cannot aſcertain minutely the due Quantity in each; the Obſervation of two Rules will ſecure us from any important Error: never to loſe the Government of ourſelves, or do an Injury to any one elſe. The firſt of theſe Directions is fundamental. For if once Reaſon be dethroned, Rules and Bounds are nothing. And though it be a dreadful Evil to let any Paſſion ſeduce us from obeying that Principle, which God hath authorized to regulate our whole Conduct, yet it is peculiarly dangerous to follow this blindfold: which precipitates Men inſtantaneouſly, and without leaving Room for a Moment's Reflection, into the Extremities of Miſchief to others and themſelves; and even where it is not hurtful, is however ſingularly diſagreeable and unbecoming. We muſt therefore attentively remember, that, though Diſpleaſure may be allowable, Rage cannot: and accordingly forbear, not only all Acts of Violence or Inſult, but all vehement Geſtures, all noiſy and unreaſonable Talk, and above the reſt that ſhocking, though common Method of venting Fury, by Oaths and Imprecations: invoking the Notice of God

in a Condition when we ought to dread it; and bringing down that Wrath on our own Heads, which we vainly and wickedly call for upon others.

But avoiding theſe Extravagances is not all: is nothing indeed, if, under a calmer Appearance, we permit our Reſentment to go undue Lengths. It is true, Anger can be uſeful to others only by giving them Uneaſineſs: but often a plain and grave Signification, that we diſlike their Behaviour, will give it ſufficiently: and then to add cutting, though guarded, Words is cruel. Sometimes the ſame Perſon, having both blameable and valuable Qualities, nay exerting both together, may deſerve that Reproof ſhould be tempered with Praiſe. And where but little Forbearance hath been merited, Prudence frequently requires much to be exerciſed: becauſe it may ſoften and win over thoſe, whom Roughneſs would drive to Deſperation.

And, if we ought thus to moderate the juſt Expreſſions of our Diſpleaſure: much more ought unjuſt ones to be utterly forborn. We muſt by no means think, that every trifling, or perhaps imaginary, Provocation gives us a Liberty, which the very greateſt do not, of be-

traying Secrets, throwing random Aſperſions, and ſaying in the peeviſh Fit whatever it ſuggeſts. Men do not loſe all the Rights of human Nature immediately, becauſe they have chanced to offend us. Their Fault in doing ſo may be conſiderable, or may be ſmall: but this one Crime cannot transform them into quite different Creatures from what they were before: it can never intitle us to ſpeak Falſehoods of them: and very ſeldom, to ſay prejudicial Truths. Injurious Words may ſeem a ſlight Matter to thoſe who utter them; eſpecially if they are ſuch, as the World calls decent: but the Perſon, to whom they relate, experiences them to be heavy and bitter Things: and what his Feelings muſt be, is the Point, that we ſhould have in View, reflecting what our own would be in the like Caſe.

However, the Guilt of Anger is yet more aggravated, when it miſguides our Actions, as well as our Tongues. If it prompts us only to withhold from others, without Cauſe, thoſe Kindneſſes and Favours, to which they had ſome equitable Claim, or, which, though they had not, we had hitherto ſhewn them, or intended for them; this alone is very hard and wrong Uſage. Indeed who almoſt could be ſecure

even of a Day's Continuance of Friendſhip, if every Thing, which it were poſſible to take amiſs, might put an End to it? But, if Wrath puſh us on to do Harm inſtead of Good, then it hath arrived at its Heighth of Injuſtice. Not but we may lawfully in ſome Caſes inflict Puniſhment on thoſe, who have given us Offence. But then Anger is not to be the Proſecutor: much leſs to paſs or execute the Sentence. It is not ſo often, as we are juſtly diſpleaſed with any one, that he is to ſuffer: but then only, when a valuable Purpoſe requires it. Now we are by no Means qualified to determine that Point, while our inward Diſturbance is vehement: nor ſhould we ever allow ourſelves to act, before we are cool enough to judge: nor are we always cool enough, when we think we are. And therefore we ſhould learn to ſuſpect our Tempers, have Regard to the Opinion of the unprejudiced, and lean to the moderate Side, when there is any Doubt which is right. It will comparatively ſeldom happen, that Exceſs of Mildneſs will do any great Miſchief: but the contrary Extreme cauſes an incredible deal perpetually. Every Day we ſee thoſe, who are poſſeſſed by this evil Spirit, return monſtrous Acts of Injuſtice for ſlight Inſtances

ſtances of Neglect or Unfriendlineſs; imagine their Diſpleaſure, whenceſoever it ariſes, a Juſtification for ſtirring up all the World againſt the Object of it; and look upon themſelves as ill uſed, if every one elſe will not be as unreaſonable, as they are.

But I go on the next Branch of the Rule, which is,

IV. That we be angry only at ſuch Times, as we ought.

And therefore it immediately occurs, never till we are ſure, that the Thing, which offends us, is really done, and really a Matter to take Offence at. *Blame not, before thou haſt examined the Truth: underſtand firſt, and then rebuke* [a]. Some are eternally ſuſpecting, and finding Fault at all Adventures; as if they felt a Delight in the Imagination of Things being amiſs. Theſe, even when there happens to be Foundation for their Cenſures, are in the wrong notwithſtanding; for it is more than they knew beforehand: but, when it proves, as it often will, that all their ill Humour was groundleſs; this is very ſhameful to themſelves, and very injurious to others; hardens them, inſtead of having any good Effect upon them; and brings

[a] Eccluſ. xi. 7.

them at last to think it the better Way, since they must be blamed, to be blamed for something. But suppose there be an Appearance of Reason to chide: yet Appearances are deceitful; and Passion spreads a Mist before our Understandings, which keeps us from seeing any thing exactly, and makes every thing look bigger than it is. No one therefore should express, or even inwardly indulge, the least Warmth, till he hath first considered the Case, as calmly as he can; and then, if there be Room for it, hath given the Parties, whom he suspects, Liberty and Time to make their Defence; attending to it with a sincere Desire of finding them innocent; making no Determination, till he hath searched the Matter fully; and being, in Obedience to St. *James*'s Direction, *swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to Wrath* [b]. The passionate Person is just the Reverse of this: impatient of all Attempts to set him right; resolute to have that true, which he hath once imagined; eager to pass and execute immediate Judgement. It may therefore be of the utmost Consequence to get, though it were only a little Space, for cool Reflection. There is very small Danger, but that even after it we shall be

[b] James i. 19.

angry

angry enough, if we have Cauſe: and there is great Danger, that without it we may be angry, though we have no Cauſe; or at leaſt much more angry, than we have any Shadow of Cauſe.

But admitting it to be ſeaſonable for us to conceive the Indignation, that we do: yet ſeveral Things may render the preſent Time improper to vent it. We may be likely juſt then to exceed due Bounds: at leaſt it may diſcompoſe us too much; and perhaps unfit us for Duties or Employments, to which we are immediately called: it may give Uneaſineſs, or ſhew Diſreſpect, to the Company we are in, whom we ſhould never unneceſſarily trouble with our Vexations: or it may have a wrong Effect on the Object of our Diſpleaſure. If he be under the more than ordinary Influence of ſome vehement Paſſion, or his Reaſon be any other Way diſturbed or clouded; if ſome Prejudice, which cannot be removed inſtantly, makes him deaf in the mean while to all, that we can ſay; if his Temper be not now ſerious enough to mind Reproof, or the Circumſtances of Time or Place or Company be ſuch, that he will reſent it as an Indignity: *the Diſcretion of a Man*

a Man ſhould defer his Anger [e], how eager ſoever it may be to burſt forth. But we are ſtill more firmly bound to reſtrain ourſelves, when the faulty have ſuffered by their Faults, and want Conſolation inſtead of Rebuke. Reſentment was planted in us to diſcourage or withſtand the injurious, not to inſult the miſerable: to give People a lively Senſe of their Miſbehaviour; not to triumph over them, when they have that Senſe already; perhaps more of it, than they can well bear. Or, though they feel their Folly but imperfectly, yet if the Conſequences of it be heavy upon them; either caſting them off, or ſeverely reproaching them, at ſuch Times, is very ungenerous: and kind Forbearance, one would imagine, cannot fail to make the good Impreſſions on them, that we wiſh. If indeed they ſtill remain void of Reflection on their Conduct, and it be our Province to awaken them, we muſt attempt it: but as gently, as the Caſe will permit; and perhaps, not till having done whatever we properly can towards relieving their Diſtreſſes, we thus acquire an indiſputable Right of laying before them, with ſome Warmth

[e] Prov. xix. 11.

of

of Expoſtulation, their paſt Errors, in order to prevent the future.

The concluding Part of the Rule under Conſideration is,

V. That we be angry only ſo long as we ought.

It is poſſible indeed, though very uncommon, that Men may lay aſide their Diſpleaſure, at leaſt the Appearance of it, too ſoon; before it hath produced its intended Effect: and, giving more Credit, than they have Cauſe, to a few fair Promiſes, take little Notice, how they are performed. Thus every one around them finds out the Way of dealing with them: and perceiving, on how eaſy Terms all may be made up, tranſgreſſes without Fear. Sometimes the very ſame Perſon is in the firſt Moments much too violent, and afterwards, poſſibly from a Conſciouſneſs of that, as much too remiſs: and ſo is blameable and deſpiſed on both Accounts. But the oppoſite Extreme is the ordinary one: and generally the worſt Sin, that accompanies this Paſſion. Some Exceſs of ſudden Anger is to many a Frailty ſcarce avoidable. For it is exceedingly difficult to eſcape being carried a little too far by an Emotion of Mind, which ſeems to be only Zeal for what

is

is right, and allows ſuch ſhort Warning to be on our Guard. If indeed we let one thing or another be provoking us almoſt perpetually, we muſt not think it a great Alleviation, that our Peeviſhneſs doth not dwell on any ſingle Point long, but quickly provides itſelf a freſh Object. Or if we fly out at once into ſuch Extravagances, as to do in a little Time almoſt as much Miſchief, as we could in a great deal: it is a poor Plea to make in our own Favour, that when we have ſatiated our Fury, or worn down our Spirits with it, we are calm again.

But if undue Haſtineſs neither returns frequently, nor goes outrageous Lengths; though always a Tranſgreſſion, yet it is in ſome Meaſure an excuſeable one; whereas the Aggravations of rooted laſting Bitterneſs are moſt heinous. For when there hath been Space for Warmth to cool, for Reaſon to reſume its Dominion, for Religion to ſoften Men into a Spirit of Forgiveneſs, for Friends to interpoſe their Advice and Perſuaſions, for every Motive to exert itſelf; ſtill to continue implacable, and deliberately to fortify ourſelves in the Wrong, is confirmed Wickedneſs. And yet Men indulge it ſtrangely: and if nothing chances in a very little while to appeaſe their firſt Rage, allow it

to

to ſettle into a Habit of ill Will; which giving them leſs impetuous Agitations, than they felt at firſt, they fancy themſelves to have ſufficiently recovered their Temper, and proceed in their Guilt without ſuſpecting it. We ſhould therefore be conſcientiouſly watchful over our Hearts in this Particular. And readieſt of all we ſhould be to lay aſide that Diſpleaſure, which we ought never to have entertained: and be Friends again immediately, when it is our own Fault, that we ever were otherwiſe. Yet, I fear, many cheriſh unreaſonable Reſentment, becauſe they ſecretly feel it is unreaſonable, and never forgive thoſe, whom they have once injured. They have run into a Difficulty, out of which they cannot extricate themſelves to their Liking: and therefore will perſiſt for ever in acting amiſs, rather than own, that they have acted ſo at all. Now, it muſt be granted, their Situation is a very mortifying one. Anger implies a Charge upon another of Miſbehaviour. And when this Charge hath been brought and urged, perhaps in very ſtrong Terms; to retract it, and make Submiſſions inſtead of receiving them, muſt doubtleſs be a Taſk highly diſagreeable: which is an excellent Reaſon for avoiding

avoiding cauſeleſs Wrath: but it is no Reaſon for perſevering in it. *Solomon*'s Counſel is very wiſe: *Go not forth haſtily to ſtrive, leſt thou know not what to do in the End thereof, when thy Neighbour hath put thee to Shame*[d]. But if we are got into ſuch a Condition, the ſpeedieſt Retreat is the beſt. Good People will moderate our Shame, by accepting our firſt Advances towards a Confeſſion, that we have erred. And if others require fuller Satisfaction, we muſt give it them: for it would be monſtrous to do them yet more Wrong, becauſe we have done them ſome already.

But neareſt in Guilt to the Anger, which was originally cauſeleſs, is that which becomes ſo by laſting beyond its Cauſe. Many Things furniſh juſt Ground of Animadverſion; ſo juſt, that we ſhould be to blame, if we omitted it: and yet are of ſo ſlight a Nature, that we ſhould be more to blame, if we did not, after duly ſignifying our Diſlike of them, return immediately to our former Diſpoſition and Behaviour, even towards the Perſon concerned. For there would be no living in any Comfort, if every little Offence were to be lengthened out, and the moſt made of it that can. There-

[d] Prov. xxv. 8.

fore

fore in ſuch Caſes, far from *letting the Sun go down upon our Wrath* [e], we ſhould not let the next Hour, ſometimes the next Moment, ſee the leaſt Marks of it. Where there is Need, they may continue longer: and be increaſed or leſſened, according to the Occaſion. The Tokens of our Diſpleaſure may be ſuſpended for a Time, and gentler Methods tried; which are always the beſt, when they are likely to be effectual; then reſumed, if Circumſtances demand it. But as ſoon as ever the Fault is reformed, though not perfectly, yet as far as we can fairly expect, after all Allowances made, (and in moſt Caſes a great many ſhould be made) then without Delay we ſhould declare ourſelves reconciled, for we cannot any longer *be angry and not ſin*.

One principal Diſcouragement of ſuch Reformation is, that we commonly require of Perſons, beſides the Aſſurance of giving no Offence for the future, great Submiſſions for what is paſt. And they ſhould always think it their Duty to make them: but we ſhould for the moſt Part think it ours not to inſiſt on them. Indeed their chief Objection againſt acknowledging their Miſdemeanour, frequently

[e] Eph. iv. 26.

is, that they imagine it will be in vain. And were they but undeceived by any little Intimations of our Diſpoſition to forgive, they would repay us fully afterwards for that Goodneſs, to which they would gladly have applied before, if Deſpair had not withheld them. Or if they cannot even thus be brought to own themſelves culpable in ſo many Words: yet perhaps they will do it, readily and ſufficiently, in a leſs direct Manner. And the Truth is, that ſome Sorts of Acknowledgements may be unſuitable to ſome Sorts of Perſons on ſome Occaſions. But if any one ſhould by Miſtake apprehend it beneath him to comply with what in Strictneſs he is bound to: yet, provided he ſhews but any Way, that he is conſcious of his Error, and purpoſes to avoid it for the future, both Charity and Humanity forbid rigorous Demands of more. Nay, though even ſuch tacit Confeſſions and Promiſes may be ſomewhat imperfect and ambiguous, favourable and liberal Conſtructions ought to be put upon them: for we ſhould ever encourage Perſons to amend by facilitating the Means of it, to the beſt of our Power. Much more then is it incumbent on us to baniſh Reſentment intirely, when all the Satisfaction

faction hath been offered us, that can be made, though perhaps a full Compenſation can never be made. For it is not the Damage, but the Injury done us, that juſtifies our Anger. And therefore, when the Injury is removed by Repentance, though the Damage continue, the Anger ought to ceaſe: becauſe the Offender being now returned to his right Mind, and become what he ſhould, Diſpleaſure againſt him afterwards is Diſpleaſure againſt a good Perſon, inſtead of a bad one.

I do not ſay, that we ought always immediately to believe every one, who profeſſes Concern, and makes fair Promiſes. But we certainly ought to be careful, that Paſſion doth not keep us from believing what in itſelf is probable. Unleſs we are as ready to be reconciled, as we were to be provoked; and give as much Credit, upon equal Proof, to the Penitence, as we did to the Crime; we are not in a reaſonable and Chriſtian Temper. If therefore the Evidences of any one's Amendment be ſtrong enough only to ſuſpend our bad Opinion of him, we ſhould ſuſpend our Anger too: and as they grow ſufficient to change it, we ſhould change proportionably into kind Behaviour, and due Eſteem.

Indeed, ſuppoſing there be no Amendment in him, though we cannot poſſibly think well of him in that Reſpect, yet we may in others; for there are ſtrange Mixtures in moſt People of Faults and good Qualities. Or, were we to think ever ſo ill of him upon the Whole, and with ever ſo much Cauſe, we ſhould by no Means be at Liberty, even then, to cheriſh a conſtant Indignation at him boiling in our Breaſts: but our Diſapprobation of his Character ought to be gentle and mild. For when Anger, from being an occaſional Paſſion for a Time, degenerates into a ſettled State of Mind, it deſerves a harſhre Name, that of Rancour. And though in ſuch a State we may appear compoſed, and may in Reality feel no vehement Emotions, this alone is far from proving us innocent. If ill Will be the Principle of our Conduct towards any of our Fellow-Creatures; if we ſuppreſs their Merit, undervalue their good Actions, give a bad Turn to ſuch as are capable of a better, aggravate their Failures, and do them all the Harm that we ſafely and quietly can; it is no Alleviation, but the contrary, that we are able to do it without loſing the Command of ourſelves. And there are ſome of ſo calm a Malice, that they

can

can plot and execute ſuch Miſchief, as the moſt paſſionate Man, in the very Fit of his Paſſion, would recoil at; and yet preſerve to others, and perhaps to their own Minds, the Shew of being very good-tempered. But this deliberate ſilent Hatred, as it is the deepeſt rooted and moſt durable, ſo it is the moſt horrible, Depravity of all others, and the fartheſt diſtant from that Spirit of Forgiveneſs, without which, we ſhall not be forgiven.

Let us therefore *in Malice be Children; but in Underſtanding, Men*[f]*: let us not be overcome of Evil, but overcome Evil with Good*[g].

[f] 1 Cor. xiv. 20. [g] Rom. xii. 21.

SERMON V.

EPHESIANS iv. 26.

Be ye angry, and ſin not.

THE due Bounds of Anger, with the common Exceſſes of them, have been deſcribed in my two laſt Diſcourſes: And therefore I now proceed,

II. To diſſuade you from them, by ſhewing you their bad Effects; of which you cannot but have ſeen many already: but ſtill it will be needful to ſet forth Part of them more diſtinctly, and add others to them.

Some ill Conſequences of immoderate Anger we feel immediately from the very Workings of it within us. For the Paſſion, prone as we are to indulge it, is eſſentially uneaſy. The Goodneſs of God hath conſtituted our inward

Frame in ſuch a Manner, that the kind Affections are all attended with Delight: but thoſe Emotions, which tend to give others Pain, produce it firſt in ourſelves; to reſtrain us from ever indulging them further than is neceſſary. The loweſt Degree of Diſpleaſure, as the mere Word implies, muſt be unpleaſing: preſents unwelcome Thoughts and Views of Things to the Mind, which more or leſs unfit it, ſo long as they laſt, for the chearful and eaſy Enjoyment of Life. But if it riſe to any Heighth, its Agitations are acutely miſerable: they rack and tear our Souls; and, if they return frequently, conſume our Health and Vigour: though indeed, were we ever ſo ſtrong to bear them, there is no Happineſs in being able to ſupport the Renewal of Torments. Then, beſides this inſeparable Feeling, there muſt often, as it is very fit there ſhould, be a ſecond, for the Time almoſt intolerable, that of failing in the Miſchief, to which our Fury prompts us. And yet Succeſs in it will only, after a ſhort-lived inhuman Tranſport, bring on a greater Variety of dreadful Sufferings. For there quickly ſucceeds a State unſpeakably painful, of Rage at ourſelves inſtead of others; or at leaſt of exhauſted Spirits, Dejection at the

the Rememberance of our Wickedneſs and Folly; bitter, and, it may be, fruitleſs, Anguiſh for the cruel Things, that we have ſaid or done. And the longer it is, before we reflect thus, the more Matter we hoard up to make Reflection frightful, when it comes.

Indeed one ſingle Conſideration might be enough to prove Anger a wretched Condition; that our Enemies are always endeavouring to put us into it: whom it is an innocent Revenge to mortify, by reſolving to diſappoint them; and preſerve ourſelves in a Calm, whatever Storms we ſee around us. He, who doth this, hath found the true Secret, for paſſing his Days with Comfort, and conducting his Affairs happily. Such a one ſees on all Sides of him, and apprehends every Thing juſt as it is: makes the moſt of each favourable Opportunity; and gives diſadvantageous Circumſtances the beſt Turn, of which they are capable. But Paſſion ſo infatuates Men, that they run directly upon evident Ruin without perceiving it: nor will they always avoid it, when they do perceive it. *A wiſe Man feareth, and departeth from Evil: but a Fool rageth, and is confident*[a]. At beſt, they often loſe a Point of

[a] Prov. xiv. 16.

Conſequence by their Warmth about a Trifle: diſoblige in a Fit of Peeviſhneſs their moſt zealous Friends, and ſometimes turn them into the moſt dangerous Adverſaries. For paſt Intimacies furniſh peculiar Means of doing Hurt for the future: and a *Brother offended is harder to be won, than a ſtrong City* [b]. Then, at the ſame Time that they provoke needleſs Enmities, they give all their Enemies needleſs Advantages: often betraying their own Deſigns, perpetually forwarding thoſe of their Oppoſers. For while they raſhly preſs on upon others, they lay themſelves open without Defence, and verify the Saying of the wiſe King: *He that hath no Rule over his own Spirit, is like a City that is broken down, and without Walls* [c]. Nothing requires more Coolneſs, than what uſually raiſes the moſt Heat: meeting with unreaſonable Oppoſition. They who cannot paſs by ſmall Injuries unnoticed, will generally draw down great ones upon their own Heads. For Anger on ſuch Occaſions, however juſt, ſerves only to make bad People worſe, and afford them Handles for doing more effectually what they wiſh. *Kindle not* therefore *the Coals of a Sinner, leſt thou be*

[b] Prov. xviii. 19. [c] Prov. xxv. 28.

burnt

burnt with the Flame of his Fire. Riſe not up in Anger at the Preſence of an injurious Perſon, leſt he lie in wait to intrap thee in thy Words [d].

Another grievous Diſadvantage of a paſſionate Temper is, that it hinders Men from receiving Advice. Not every one dares, and no one hath Encouragement, to give it them. For they will ſeldom bear the Intimation of an Error in what they do, or an Objection to what they propoſe. Nay, too commonly, alledging Reaſons againſt a Thing, increaſes their Poſitiveneſs in Favour of it. For Anger joins the two unfitteſt Companions in the World, Raſhneſs and Obſtinacy. Or, if good Counſel chances to be once followed, the ſame Impatience, which hath brought them into one Difficulty, will ſoon bring them into another, as bad. So that, to uſe *Solomon*'s Words, *a Man of great Wrath ſhall ſuffer Puniſhment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou muſt do it again* [e]. What uſually inflames our Reſentments is the Deſire of promoting our own Schemes and Intereſts. Now, on the contrary, this is the very Inducement, which ſhould moderate and check them. For however triumphantly out-

[d] Ecclus. viii. 10, 11. [e] Prov. xix. 19.

rageous

rageous People may ſeem to bear down all before them for a Time: yet it is ever the cool Head, that carries the Point at laſt. *Better is the End of a Thing, than the Beginning thereof: and the patient in Spirit is better than the proud in Spirit. Be not haſty in thy Spirit to be angry: for Anger reſteth in the Boſom of Fools* [f]. But ſuppoſing Perſons of this Turn to have at Heart, not their own private Intereſt, but public Good: very often their Heat will miſlead them to do Evil inſtead of it; and that, moſt dreadful Evil. For the ſtrong Impreſſion of being in the Right, under which they act, inclines them to run greater Lengths in what is wrong, than any Thing elſe could. And thus *the Wrath of Man worketh not*, even when he may intend it, *the Righteouſneſs of God* [g]. Indeed were a Deſign ever ſo well choſen, and harmleſsly carried on, yet few Things are ſo likely to hinder the Succeſs of it, as too great Vehemence: which hath alſo this further Inconvenience, that after they, whom it animates, have ſpent their firſt Fire, they are the apteſt of all others to flag and deſpair, and abandon their Undertaking.

But, beſides that we thus embarraſs and diſ-

[f] Eccl. vii. 8, 9. [g] James i. 20.

appoint

appoint ourſelves, we ought to reflect, what Sort of Figure we make to others. Generally People endeavour to hide their Frailties: *but he that is haſty of Spirit*, proclaims his; and, as the Scripture expreſſes it, *exalteth Folly* [h]. He aims at the Appearance indeed of great Importance and Superiority: and would have it paſs for inward Strength, that he exerts himſelf ſo immoderately. But unreaſonable Paſſions are no more a Proof of healthy Vigour in the Soul, than Fevers or Convulſions are in the Body. Every little Accident affects and flutters an infirm Conſtitution: while thoſe of a juſter Make bear conſiderable Changes undiſturbed. In the ſame Manner a rightly tempered Mind repulſes even great Aſſaults without Effort, and remains unmoved; while the ſlighteſt Trials put a weak one into remarkable Agitations. Perſons of the tendereſt Frames, of the ſmalleſt Experience and Knowledge, of the loweſt or the moſt impaired Faculties, have uſually the leaſt Command of themſelves, when provoked. Nor doth the ſudden Fierceneſs, with which Reſentment inſpires Men, at all imply true Bravery, though it may accidentally produce ſome Effects like

[h] Prov. xiv. 29.

it:

it: for this even Extremity of Fear will do. Then further, exceſſive Anger is attended with all imaginable Symptoms of Weakneſs. For it makes the wiſeſt People ſay and act the ſilliest Things that can be; and become quite ridiculous, whilſt they aim to appear terrible: threatening what they dare not do, attempting what they cannot do, and what, when the mad Fit is a little over, for the World they would not, if they could: expoſing themſelves by the moſt wretched falſe Reaſonings; laying great Streſs upon Trifles, that will bear none at all; and, when one wild Aſſertion is confuted, running inſtantly to another to juſtify their Choler, and all in vain. So piteous is the Figure, that the paſſionate make: and it is often a laſting Shame, which the bluſtering Affectation of falſe Greatneſs brings upon them in a few Moments. Compoſure is an eſſential Part of true Dignity: and an elevated Soul is above taking Notice of the impotent Attacks, which a mean one ſhews its Meanneſs by buſying itſelf to reſent and return.

Some Sort of exorbitant Anger indeed is far from deſerving Contempt: but in Proportion as it ceaſes to be deſpicable, it becomes hateful. Nay, it hath often both theſe bad Qualities

lities at once. The little Fretfulneſs that goes no further than peeviſh Words at every Turn, though an Object of Deriſion, yet breaks grievouſly in upon the Quiet of Life, and Freedom of Converſation: puts every one, that comes near the Perſon ſubject to it, under very diſagreeable Reſtraints; and uſually to ſmall Purpoſe. For the leaſt Incident of a thouſand ſhall be ſufficient to turn his higheſt good Humour into a furious Rage, a perverſe Captiouſneſs, or a ſullen Silence: while he himſelf doth not know, or is aſhamed to tell, at what he is offended; and yet, like a froward Child, grows the more unmanageable for the Pains taken to pleaſe him. This muſt cauſe Uneaſineſs to all that ſee it: but ſome have a Tenderneſs of Mind, that makes them feel it acutely. They fear they have done amiſs, and ſearch in vain for what can have given ſuch great Diſguſt. But eſpecially they, who have either any Affection for ſuch an unreaſonable Perſon, or any Intereſt depending on his Regard for them, muſt be perpetually miſerable with him. So that, when theſe Wretches do no worſe, they perplex and diſquiet every one about them; and thoſe moſt, to whom they ſhould be the kindeſt. But

when their Paſſion burſts forth with any uncommon Degree of Vehemence, then it hath Effects yet more ſerious: the moſt grating and diſobliging Things are ſaid, that can be invented; Failings unmercifully expoſed; cruel Imputations, though known to be falſe, injuriouſly made; Secrets divulged, that ought to have been for ever hidden; Promiſes broken, that ſhould have been kept inviolably: and all this, merely becauſe an inconſiderate Creature is pleaſed to be in a Rage, perhaps without a Shadow of Ground for it.

Thus even the more tranſitory Fits of Anger hurry Men into Behaviour extremely wicked: and a Storm of Fury, that poſſibly doth not laſt a Quarter of an Hour, deſtroys or grievouſly diminiſhes the Comfort of another, it may be through all his Days. But when their Diſpleaſure takes deeper Root, and infects the Temper with a ſettled ill Will; then they will make it the Buſineſs of their Lives to depreſs and ſit heavy upon the Object of their Malignity, to fruſtrate his moſt equitable Expectations, and follow him about with unwearied Labours to blaſt the Succeſs of every Thing, which he undertakes. Neither Generoſity, nor Humanity, nor Goodneſs of Character,

racter, nor Nearneſs of Relation, nor Greatneſs of Favours received, can extinguiſh their Reſentment: which ſometimes conceals itſelf under ſpecious Pretences and ſmiling Appearances, watching the Opportunity of ſome effectual Miſchief; at others, incapable of Diſguiſe, it blazes forth in open Violence; Laws and Puniſhments, human and divine, are unable to deter them, and nothing ſhort of immediate Deſtruction will aſſuage their Hatred. How pernicious muſt People of this Character be in Society; how dangerous muſt they appear in the Eyes of Men, how guilty in the Sight of God! Guilty, not only of all the Evil, which they have directly done; but all, which they have either incited others to do for them, or provoked others to do againſt them. For *an angry Man ſtirreth up Strife, and a furious Man aboundeth in Tranſgreſſion*[i].

The Miſbehaviours and croſs Accidents, of which this World is full, were intended to exerciſe thoſe Virtues of Meekneſs and Patience, which the next World is intended to reward. But to uſe the Vexations of Life as Opportunities to run mad and do Miſchief, is acting contrary to the whole Deſign of our

[i] Prov. xxix. 22.

Maker; contrary to the native Tenderneſs of our own Hearts, to our Conſciouſneſs of human Frailties, to the Pity we ought to feel for the Miſeries of human Circumſtances; contrary to the Dictates of Natural Religion, which requires us to imitate the Goodneſs we adore, and to the moſt expreſs Precepts of Chriſtianity, which allows us not the leaſt Hope of God's Mercy on any other Condition, than this, that *if we forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, our heavenly Father will alſo forgive us* [k].

But here ſome will plead, that however hurtful to ourſelves or others this Paſſion may be, it cannot be ſo ſinful as it hath been repreſented, becauſe it is often involuntary. And ſome Degrees of it, we muſt own, ſeem to be ſo: and the Temptations of our corrupt Nature to very blameable Degrees are often exceedingly ſtrong. But ſtill in ſuch Caſes we are ſtrangely willing to believe much leſs to be in our Power, than, by the Help of God's Grace, is. And the Way to know, how far it really extends, will be, not to imagine about it, and lament that we cannot do what in Truth we can do very well: but to try, and that by the Uſe of proper Means. For they,

[k] Matth. vi. 14.

who

who are totally unable to check their Paſſion by an immediate Effort of their Mind at the Time, had they governed themſelves rightly before, perhaps would ſcarce have felt any Paſſion to check. And therefore I ſhall now proceed in Concluſion,

III. To direct, how exceſſive Anger may beſt be avoided.

Now the great general Rule for this and every good Purpoſe is, to obtain from God, by reading his Holy Word, by Meditation and Prayer, the Spirit of Love to him and to our Neighbour. In Proportion as that *rules in our Hearts* [1], we ſhall be humble and meek, live as being always in his Preſence, fear to offend him, deſire to pleaſe him, labour to imitate him: we ſhall think often and ſeriouſly what great Provocations from us our heavenly Father hath paſſed over, through ſo long a Courſe of Years; what ſhocking Indignities our bleſſed Redeemer underwent contentedly and ſilently for our Sakes; with what perſevering Patience the Holy Ghoſt offers to us his ſanctifying Influences, notwithſtanding all we do to grieve him; how effectually pious Men, in all Ages, have been moved by theſe Benefits

[1] Col. iii. 15.

to copy the divine Long-ſuffering: we ſhall learn to bear with our Fellow-Sinners, with whom the Almighty bears: we ſhall call to Mind, that he hath made them of the ſame Blood, united them into the ſame Body under Chriſt our Head, ſtrives with them by the ſame Spirit: we ſhall recollect, that he commands us to forgive each others Treſpaſſes and promote each others Happineſs, and will treat us as we treat our Brethren: that all the Vexations which befall us here, if we go through them with the Temper, which we ought, inſtead of doing us the leaſt Harm, ſhall unſpeakably augment our Felicity hereafter; and that by all the Injuries, which others do us, however they may triumph in them at preſent, they are only *heaping Coals of Fire on their own Heads*[m]: a Conſideration, that ſurely ſhould melt our Anger into Pity, and induce us never to go a Step farther in Correction or Reſentment, than Security requires; but leave Vengeance to him, whoſe it is. Thus then from the two inſeparable Commandments of Love to God and Man, flow ineſtimable Motives to mild Sentiments and gentle Behaviour, by which pious and Chriſtian

[m] Rom. xii. 20.

Minds

Minds will be powerfully influenced; experiencing not only their natural Force, but the additional Efficacy of Divine Grace, annexed to the Uſe of them. And there is no other radical Cure of irregular Paſſions. But ſtill, together with this univerſal Medicine, there are ſeveral auxiliary and appropriated Rules of Regimen during our Continuance in the Courſe of it, to be followed, and therefore needful to be ſpecified.

One is, that we avoid forming refined and romantic Notions of human Perfection in any Thing. For theſe are much apter to heighten our Expectations from others, and our Demands upon them, than to increaſe our Watchfulneſs over ourſelves: and ſo every Failure provokes us more highly, than it would have done elſe. A Senſe of Things, too delicate for our Nature, and the State in which we live, is no Accompliſhment, but an Infirmity. And overſtrained Notions of Friendſhip or Honour, or any virtuous Attainment, conſtantly do Harm. For if we fancy ourſelves arrived at theſe Heights; we ſhall reſent it as Profanation, when the reſt of the World treat us as being nearly on the Level with them, which yet they certainly will. And if we go

to meaſure thoſe around us by theſe Ideas; we ſhall look on Perſons, whenever we have a Mind to do ſo, as Monſters not to be ſupported, who, in a reaſonable Way of thinking, would appear very tolerably good People. We ſhould therefore endeavour, by frequent Reflection, to form a Habit of judging with Moderation concerning our Neighbours and ourſelves. Man is a fallen Being, defective in his Underſtanding, and depraved in his Inclinations; placed in Circumſtances, in which many Things call him off from what he ſhould do, many Things prompt him to what he ſhould not do; and often, before he hath well learned to diſtinguiſh one from the other, or too ſuddenly for him to apply the Diſtinction rightly.

Now only reflect, when a Multitude of ſuch Creatures as theſe are put to live together, with Intereſts and Appetites, Humours and Fancies, interfering every Hour; what a Number of wrong Actions muſt of Courſe be continually done, and ſome of them very wrong: which yet may be attended with ſuch Alleviations, that even a ſuperior faultleſs Nature, looking down upon our Earth, would by no Means impute all that was amiſs, as heinous Guilt to the Perſons that did it. This however is no Reaſon,

why

why we ſhould indulge ourſelves in Failings: for wilful Indulgence is always criminal. But it is a ſtrong Reaſon, why we ſhould not be bitter againſt others, on finding them ſuch, as we had Cauſe to expect they would be; but receive a large Share of Uneaſineſs from them contentedly, and a ſmall one, with Thankfulneſs that it is no greater; eſpecially conſidering, what we can never bear in Mind too much, that no one of us is that ſuperior faultleſs Nature, which I have been ſuppoſing; but each of us a poor frail Being, with the Seeds in him at leaſt of all the vile Actions, that we charge upon others: and on the Whole perhaps as bad, perhaps even worſe than ſome of thoſe, at whom we are ſo vehemently exaſperated.

Almoſt every one is apt to join ſome Notion of peculiar Dignity to his own Perſon: and to imagine, that Offences are greatly aggravated by being committed againſt him: that his Character and Concerns, his Family and Friends, his Opinions and Taſte, ought to be treated with a ſingular Degree of Regard. But then really we ſhould remember, that Multitudes beſides may juſt as allowably think the ſame Thing of theirs; indeed that all Men are as dear to themſelves, as we can be to ourſelves: which

brings us back ſo far upon the Level again. And the ſerious Conſideration of it muſt ſurely convince us, that our common Intereſt, as well as Duty, is, to think and act mildly; that *Pride was not made for Man, nor furious Anger for them that are born of a Woman* [n].

Other Directions muſt be given more briefly. One is not to indulge ourſelves in any Sort of over great Niceneſs and Delicacy: for it hardly ever gives real Pleaſure, and it furniſhes perpetual Occaſions of Diſguſt and Fretfulneſs. Another is, to avoid Inquiſitiveneſs after Materials for Anger to work upon. It is better not to hear of every little wrong Thing that is done about us, or ſaid of us. And therefore we ſhould never encourage Perſons in the Officiouſneſs of acquainting us with them needleſsly: but always have ſome Suſpicion of ſuch as are peculiarly forward in it. For innumerable are the Friendſhips and agreeable Acquaintances that have been broken off, and the Reſentments and Animoſities raiſed, by Tales and Inſinuations of this Kind, either wholly or in Part falſe; or idle and trifling, though true. Two other important Rules, and cloſely connected, are: firſt, never to engage by

[n] Eccluſ. x. 18.

Choice

Choice in more Buſineſs, than we can eaſily manage; for that, by cauſing Hurry and frequent Miſcarriages, will certainly cauſe Vexation and Peeviſhneſs: then, to preſerve a ſteady Attention to what we do engage in. Men are often groſsly negligent of their Affairs: and afterwards furiouſly angry at thoſe Diſorders in them, for which they themſelves are almoſt, if not quite, as much to blame, as others. Now regular Care would have prevented Miſmanagement: which alternate Fits of Remiſſneſs and Rage will never do. Indeed we ſhould obviate, as far as we can, every Thing, that we find apt to ruffle our Minds: and carry the Precaution down even to our Diverſions and Amuſements. For ſome of theſe have often ſo very bad an Effect upon the Temper, that not to apply ſo eaſy a Remedy as laying them aſide, is really inexcuſable. Another material Thing to be ſhunned, is Familiarity with paſſionate Perſons: not only for the very plain Reaſon, leſt they ſhould provoke us, but alſo leſt their Example ſhould infect us. *Make no Friendſhip with an angry Man, and with a furious Man thou ſhalt not go: leſt thou learn his Ways, and get a Snare to thy Soul*[?]. But to converſe with thoſe, who

[?] Prov. xxii. 24.

are of mild Diſpoſitions, to obſerve how they take Things, and be adviſed by them how we ſhould take them, will be of unſpeakable Service.

Theſe are Preparations before Danger. When it approaches near, the main Point is, to recollect, how dreadful it would be to give Way and loſe ourſelves, and to reſolve that we will not. Towards keeping this Reſolution we ſhall find it one great Preſervative, though it may ſeem a ſlight Matter, not to let the Accent of our Speech, or any one of our Geſtures be vehement. For theſe Things excite Paſſion mechanically: whereas a *ſoft Anſwer*, the Scripture tells us, *turneth away Wrath*[p]: compoſes the Spirit of the Giver himſelf, as well as the Receiver of it. Alſo making Uſe of the gentleſt and leaſt grating Terms, that we can, will be extremely beneficial: and accordingly it follows there, that *grievous Words ſtir up Anger*.

But if ſuch begin to preſent themſelves, and ſtruggle for Vent, we muſt reſolve to utter as few of any Sort as poſſible: or, if it become requiſite, none at all: but ſhut faſt the Door of our Lips, *till the Maſtiff within hath done barking*, as is related to have been the Practice

[p] Prov. xv. 1.

of

of *Socrates* [q]. It is a painful Reſtraint: but if we will remain Maſters of ourſelves, it is abſolutely neceſſary. For one haſty Expreſſion burſting out, makes freer Way for another: till at laſt the Banks are levelled, and the Torrent carries all before it. *A patient Man* therefore *will bear for a Time, and afterwards Joy ſhall ſpring up unto him. He will hide his Words for a Time, and the Lips of many ſhall declare his Wiſdom* [r]. But above all, we ſhould inviolably obſerve never to act in a Heat. Thoughts, alas, will be too quick for us: a few improper Words may eſcape: but Actions are much more in our Power. We may be too angry at preſent to venture upon acting at all: a little Delay can do no Harm, and may do a great deal of Good. Only when we take Time, we ſhould make a right Uſe of it: not revolve an inſignificant Offence in our Minds, interpret little Incidents with perverſe Acuteneſs, and lay Streſs upon groundleſs Fancies, till we work it up into a heinous Crime. The beſt Underſtandings, without good Tem-

[q] Περὶ δὲ τὸ μὴ συναρπασθῆναι συνεργεῖ τὰ μέγιστα ἐθισθῆναι —σιωπᾶν ἐως ἂν τῆς ἐνδοθεν ἀναζέσεως ἀδωμεθα καταλείσης, καὶ ὁ ἐν ἡμῖν κύων μηκέτι ὑλακτῇ. Λέγεται γὰρ καὶ Σωκράτης, ἐποτε θυμωθείη, πάντως σιωπᾶν. Simpl. in Epict. c. 28. p. 135. Comp. Cic. ad Quintum fratrem, l. 1. ep. 1. §. 13.

[r] Eccluſ. i. 23, 24.

pers,

pers, can go the greateſt Lengths in this Way: and employing their Reflection to excite the Diſpleaſure, which it ought to reſtrain, the longer they ruminate, the more untractable they grow. Now Paſſion may be truſted very ſafely to ſuggeſt all the aggravating Circumſtances. Reaſon therefore ſhould be called in, only to repreſent the alleviating Conſiderations: of which we perpetually overlook ſo many and ſo important ones, that we ſhould give thoſe about us all poſſible Encouragement to remind us of them. And if the Perſon, by whom we think ourſelves aggrieved, be one, with whom we have any cloſe Connection, or of whom we have Ground to think advantageouſly; laying our Complaint mildly before him, and hearkening impartially to his Anſwer, may very poſſibly ſet all right, and place us on a better Footing, than ever we were before. *Admoniſh a Friend: it may be he hath not done it; and if he have done it, that he do it no more. Admoniſh thy Friend: it may be he hath not ſaid it; and if he have, that he ſpeak it not again. Admoniſh a Friend: for many Times it is a Slander; and believe not every Tale. There is one, that ſlippeth in his Speech; but not from his Heart: and who is he, that hath not offended*

with his Tongue? Admoniſh thy Neighbour, before thou threaten him: and, not being angry, give Place to the Law of the moſt High [s]. Only this Caution ought to be obſerved in the Caſe, that ſuch, as are naturally warm and impatient, ſhould but ſeldom riſk a perſonal Explanation at firſt: but rather employ ſome common Well-wiſher; on whoſe Probity and Prudence they can ſafely depend, that he will moderate, not inflame, Matters by interpoſing. And when thus, or any Way, the Subject of Difference is rightly ſtated: if the other Party be innocent, let us admit it with Pleaſure; if he own his Fault, though not ſo fully as he ſhould, let us receive his Acknowledgement with Generoſity. And if, in Return, he brings a Charge againſt us: let us ſay with Calmneſs what we have to ſay juſtly in our own Favour; confeſs frankly, with due Concern, whatever hath been amiſs; and where there is no Room for a Defence, attempt no Palliation; but follow the Injunction of Scripture: *If thou haſt done fooliſhly, or if thou haſt thought Evil, lay thine Hand upon thy Mouth* [t]. It will be very diſhonourable, and very ſtrange in him, to treat us unkindly upon this. But if he doth, we

[s] Ecclus. xix. 13—17. [t] Prov. xxx. 32.

muſt

muſt ſubmit patiently to what we have brought upon ourſelves; and not be guilty of a ſecond Miſdemeanour, becauſe our firſt is not handſomely forgiven us.

Theſe Rules we ſhall, every one of us, more or leſs, violate. But then, through God's Grace, we may turn even our Tranſgreſſions of them to our Benefit, by gaining ſuch experimental Knowledge of ourſelves, as will ſupply us with ſpecific Directions fitted to our own Caſe; and on that Account far ſurer to be ſucceſsful at laſt, than any more general ones, that can be preſcribed to us by others.

And now, after thus delivering Rules for the Prevention or Cure of unwarrantable Reſentment, both which are Works of no ſmall Difficulty, let me add in Concluſion, that all around us ought to aſſiſt us in them: and particularly, by conſcientiouſly abſtaining from throwing in our Way any Temptations to that Sin. The intemperate Heat of the paſſionate is very blameable: but the deliberate Wickedneſs of the cool and artful, who rouſe them into Paſſion, is abominable: and even the ſportful Teazings of malicious Mirth, when employed againſt ſuch, deſerve no ſlight Cenſure. St. *Paul* twice admoniſhes Parents, *not*

to

to provoke their Children to Wrath [u]: probably becauſe it might be likely to give an early wrong Turn to their tender Minds. Now, if it be unlawful to excite a ſhort-lived Anger in theſe, who are many of them incapable of doing Hurt, be they ever ſo angry; how great a Crime is it to ſtir up Rage, where the Conſequence may be unknown Miſchief of various Sorts: and how excellent a Duty, to take every Opportunity, (and we have all of us frequently ſuch) for diſpoſing the Hearts of thoſe about us to that Spirit of Meekneſs and univerſal Goodwill, which is the Qualification for Happineſs here and hereafter! *The Fruit of Righteouſneſs is ſown in Peace of them that make Peace* [w]. *Sow to yourſelves in Righteouſneſs, and reap in Mercy* [x].

[u] Eph. vi. 4. Col. iii. 21. [w] James iii. 18. [x] Hoſ. x. 12.

SERMON VI.

MATTH. ii. 16.

Then Herod, when he ſaw, that he was mocked of the wiſe Men, was exceeding wroth; and ſent forth, and ſlew all the Children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the Coaſts thereof, from two Years old and under; according to the Time, which he had diligently enquired of the wiſe Men.

THE piteous Hiſtory, contained in theſe Words, is the Sequel of that, immediately preceding, which informs us, that, on the Birth of our Saviour in *Judea*, ſome Gentiles of Learning and Diſtinction came from the Eaſt to *Jeruſalem*, by divine Direction, to pay him Homage: on which, *Herod* the King, underſtanding that the *Meſſiah* was to be born at *Bethlehem*, ſent them thither to find him; with a Charge to bring him Notice of the Place

Place where the Child was, that he alſo might do him the ſame Honour; deſigning really to deſtroy him, inſtead of paying him Reſpect: but that, *being warned of God, not to return to Herod, they departed into their own Country another Way*[a].

The ſad Conſequences which followed their Departure, are mentioned in the Words of the Text; and preſent to us a Tranſaction of ſo remarkable a Nature as well deſerves a particular Examination into it, and an Explanation of the ſeveral Circumſtances attending it. This is what I mean to give you in the following Diſcourſe: and if, in doing it, I ſhould be led to ſpend more Time, in Proportion, than uſual, on Points not immediately belonging to the great Articles of Chriſtian Faith or Practice; you will remember, that we ought to underſtand, not only the Doctrines and Precepts, but the Hiſtory of the Goſpel: eſpecially as in the preſent unbelieving Age, Objections are too frequently made againſt the ſeveral Parts of it, in their Turns; and as a due Conſideration of every Part, will not only confirm us in the Truth of it, but furniſh abundantly more Matter of pious and moral

[a] Ver. 12.

Reflection,

Reflection, than at the firſt View it may ſeem to afford.

The Text begins with acquainting us, that *Herod, when he ſaw that he was mocked of the wiſe Men, was exceeding wroth.* Not that they had any Deſign of provoking him, or expoſing him to Contempt. That is not the Behaviour of good Perſons to the very worſt. He had commanded them indeed to *bring him Word again*, where the Child was: but probably had too haughtily preſumed on their Compliance, though not his Subjects, to think of aſking a Promiſe of them. Or, had they made one, as they naturally enough might, with a full Purpoſe of keeping it; the Warning, received from God, muſt entirely have ſuperſeded that Obligation: of which, other Things alſo might have hindered the Performance. But unreaſonable and vehement Spirits hardly ever ſtay to inquire into ſuch Matters: whatever diſappoints them, appears to them an Indignity. And accordingly *Herod* was not only ſorry, that his Intention was fruſtrated, but *exceeding wroth:* imagined it no Sin at all to contrive the Murder of the harmleſs Child whoſe Birth had been notified to him; but an intolerable Offence, that the wiſe Men ſhould, whatever

their Reaſon was, fail to be made his Inſtruments for accompliſhing it.

And now, his Wickedneſs increaſing as his Rage boiled within him, rather than miſs of committing the one Crime, which alone he deſigned at firſt, he reſolves to commit he knows not how many more of the like Sort, without any other Pretext for them: imagining that the Object of his Apprehenſions continued ſtill in the ſame Place. On that Imagination ſolely, either having firſt inquired after him in vain, (for he was removed by the Direction of God) or conceiving, that no certain Information would be obtained by a Perſon ſo abhorred as he knew himſelf to be, and that taking Time for a Search was giving Time for an Eſcape; he forms the ſhocking Reſolution of killing all the Children of *Bethlehem*, and its Territory; unmoved by Conſcience, or Compaſſion, or Fear of Revenge, or the Deteſtation of Mankind, in order to make ſure of killing that Child, from which, of all others, he ought to have abſtained, the long-expected *Hope of Iſrael*[b], the great promiſed Bleſſing to that Religion, which he himſelf profeſſed. This direful Purpoſe he orders to be put in im-

[b] Acts xxviii. 20.

mediate

mediate Execution: too many find their Intereſt in obeying his Will: no one hath Power, or Courage, to reſiſt it: the Deed is done: the poor Infants miſerably ſlain.

No Wonder, that *then*, as St. *Matthew* obſerves, *was fulfilled*, that is, verified anew, more eminently and literally, *what was ſpoken* originally on a different Occaſion, *by Jeremy the Prophet, ſaying: In Rama*, a town of *Benjamin*, adjoining to *Bethlehem* of *Judah*, which Tribes were therefore probably mixed here, as well as at *Jeruſalem* and other Places; *In Rama, a Voice was heard, Lamentation and Weeping and great Mourning: Rachel*, the Mother of *Benjamin, weeping*, that is, in the Perſons of her female Deſcendants, *for her Children; and would not be comforted, becauſe they are not:* are not any longer in this World, for a Comfort and Joy to their Friends; but taken away, to their inexpreſſible Affliction, by a Stroke of Violence, the moſt unexpected, the moſt afflicting and deſolating, the moſt exquiſitely painful and inſupportable, that can be conceived.

Some perhaps may be tempted almoſt to doubt, whether a human Creature be capable of ſuch Barbarity. But, alas, we cannot tell,

to what Degree our own Diſpoſitions might be depraved, were we to give ourſelves up to Iniquity, and provoke a juſt God to withdraw his Grace from us. Much leſs can we be ſure what amazing Abominations others may come to harbour within their Breaſts. *The Heart* of Man *is deceitful above all Things, and deſperately wicked: who can know it* [c]*?* But eſpecially the Hearts of Tyrants, grown old in the Poſſeſſion and Exerciſe of abſolute Power, accuſtomed by Flattery and Pride to think themſelves of a higher Species than the reſt of Mankind, hardened to Executions and Slaughter by long Uſe, become ſuſpicious of every Perſon and Thing, by Experience of the Falſehood of others, and Conſciouſneſs of their own; and habituated to hate their Subjects, as knowing that they are hated by them. Now ſuch, if ever Man was, *Herod* was. His whole Hiſtory, written not by a Chriſtian, but a Jew, fully proves, that no Degree of Cruelty was improbable concerning one of a Nature ſo ſavage: who, beſides the fierce Wars, in which his boundleſs Ambition engaged him, was committing Murders in cold Blood throughout his Life; of his neareſt Relations amongſt others,

[c] Jer. xvii. 9.

even

even of his own Children; every one of them from Motives of State-Jealouſy, the very Inducement that prompted him to the Inhumanity charged on him in the Text: and was ſo far from relenting at the Approach of Death, which commonly inſpires leſs hardened Sinners with Penitence and Mildneſs, that he cauſed a large Number of his principal Subjects to be aſſembled; and putting them under Confinement, bound thoſe about him by an Oath, to maſſacre them all, as ſoon as he ſhould expire; that the Nation might mourn for his Deceaſe on that Account, which on all others, he knew, would rejoice [d]. It is in vain to ſay of ſuch a one, that he ſhewed on many Occaſions a great Concern for his Reputation: and therefore was not likely to commit ſo monſtrous a Murder, as that of theſe Children. He did ſo, when he could gratify his Vanity, without prejudicing his imaginary Intereſts: but never elſe. And therefore his proceeding without Mercy in this Caſe, far from being incredible, is only an Evidence, that the Expectations of the Meſſiah's coming at that Time were great and general; and his own Apprehenſions of it inexpreſſibly ſtrong.

[d] Joſeph. Ant. l. xvii. c. 6. §. 5. Bell. Jud. l. i. c. 33. §. 6.

But ſtill it may be wondered, if *Herod* was guilty of ſo execrable a Deed, that no ancient Hiſtorian ſhould record it, and paint it in its due Colours, as they have done many Things, which deſerved it leſs: but ſhould all, excepting St. *Matthew*, omit the Mention of it [e]. Now, in Truth, there is no ancient Heathen Hiſtorian of thoſe Times extant, beſides *Suetonius:* whoſe Work is only a brief Account of the Lives of the twelve *Cæſars*; in which a Narrative of this Kind is by no Means to be expected. And, were all the Hiſtorians of that Age remaining; *Judea* lay at the Extremity of the *Roman* Empire, nor was, in *Herod*'s Reign, a Province of it, properly ſpeaking: the ſmaller internal Affairs therefore of ſuch a petty Diſtrict would be little regarded, amidſt ſo many of greater Importance. And, though the Murder of a Number of innocent Babes excites in us, with the utmoſt Reaſon, the ſtrongeſt Pity and Horror; yet, alas, the Caſe was far otherwiſe during the Days of Pagan Darkneſs; when, in the moſt civilized Nations, Parents deſtroyed, or expoſed to Deſtruction, their own Children, at

[e] *Joſeph Scaliger* is ſaid to have denied the Genuineneſs of this Part of St. *Matthew*. *Anſaldi* hath defended it, in a Book, intituled, *Herodiani Infanticidii vindiciæ*, 4°, Brixiæ, 1747.

Pleaſure,

Pleaſure, how ſtrange ſoever it may ſeem, without Scruple and without Puniſhment.

But further, it doth not appear, that any other old Authors ever did write the Life of *Herod*, or the Hiſtory of his Reign, than *Nicolas* of *Damaſcus*, and *Joſephus*. Now the Work of the former is loſt. And he was not only a Courtier and domeſtic Friend of *Herod*, but was employed as Embaſſador to *Auguſtus*, to defend him in his Life-time, and his Character after his Death, from Imputations of Tyranny and Cruelty, brought before that Emperor by the Jewiſh Nation [f]. This Man therefore neither would be inclined to relate ſuch Things of him in his Book; nor could do it indeed, without condemning himſelf for having been his Apologiſt. Beſides, he was ſo ſhamefully partial to him, as to deduce his Genealogy from a noble *Hebrew* Family; though it was notorious, that his Father was an *Edomite* [g].

As for *Joſephus:* He wrote at the Diſtance of above 90 Years after the Fact: which we are apt to conſider, as taking away many more Lives, than probably it did. *Bethlehem* was not a large Place: whether its Territory was,

[f] Joſeph. Ant. l. xvi. c. 9. §. 4. & c. 10. §. 8. & l. xvii. c. 5. §. 4 & c. 11. §. 3. & Bell. Jud. l. ii. c. 6. §. 2.
[g] Joſeph. Ant. l. xiv. c. 1. §. 3.

we know not. The Order given could be only againſt the Male Children. *Herod*, we are told, ſlew all theſe, under a certain Age: that is, all whom the Meſſengers of his bloody Purpoſe found. But poſſibly, going on ſo ſhocking an Errand, they might not be deſirous of executing their Orders with the utmoſt Secreſy and Strictneſs. Or, if they were; the Alarm, once taken, would quickly ſpread; and a conſiderable Proportion undoubtedly be carried away, or concealed. The fabulous Legends tell us indeed of vaſt Multitudes killed: but alledge no ſufficient Proof of their Aſſertions [h]. And the wiſer Authors, even of the Popiſh Communion, diſregard and ridicule them. Now, ſuppoſing the Number of the ſlaughtered Infants to be ſmall; the Memory of what a few Villagers had ſuffered, might eaſily, when Printing was unknown, and Writing not near ſo common as now, be, in much leſs Time than 90 Years, quite buried under the Stories of the many large Executions, which the Tyrant had made, of Perſons more noted,

[h] *Jerom* ſaith, *Herodes, Scribæ & Phariſæi, pro uno infante multa parvulorum millia trucidarunt.* Com. in Iſ. l. 3. c. 7. vol. 4. p. 112. Ed. Veron. But he lived about 400 Years after the Time. And as he aſſerts, what the leaſt Reflection would have ſhewn him was falſe, that the Scribes and Phariſees were guilty of this Fact, he deſerves no Credit in what lay more out of his Knowledge.

Or it might be induſtriouſly ſtifled by the unbelieving Jews, to prevent it from being of Service to the Cauſe of Chriſtianity. Or indeed it might be utterly overwhelmed by the total Deſtruction of their Country, with the Slaughter of Millions, which had happened before *Joſephus* began to compile Materials for his Book. It is therefore extremely poſſible, that this Maſſacre, though perfectly true, might never come to his Ears: or, if it did, yet not with any Certainty. And, if his Information about it ſeemed to him rather doubtful, he did wiſely in paſſing it over.

But ſuppoſing him ever ſo ſure of it; he might think proper only to involve it covertly in a general Account of the Butcheries of *Herod* about this Time; occaſioned, as he ſaith, which is exceedingly remarkable, by the Expectation of a new King [i]. For he might be unwilling, or even afraid, to offend the Poſterity of that Monarch, with one of whom, *Agrippa*, he was intimate, by the expreſs Relation of a Barbarity ſo unmanly: and might think, that he had ſufficiently given his Readers to underſtand *Herod*'s Character, without ſay-

[i] Ant. l. xvii. c. 2. §. 4.

ing

ing more [k]. If the Teſtimony concerning our Saviour, aſcribed to him, be genuine; his omitting to name theſe Children will be an Objection of ſmall Weight againſt the Goſpel Hiſtory. And if that Teſtimony be not genuine; it will be no Wonder in the leaſt, that he, who, for the Sake of paying Court to *Veſpaſian*, as the foretold *Meſſiah*, could ſuppreſs the Mention of *Jeſus*, and his Miracles, ſhould avoid to record a Fact, which muſt have brought the ſame *Jeſus* in View, under that Character; and *Bethlehem*, as the Place where the Meſſiah ſhould be born [l]. He hath been ſilent, in other Parts of his Work, for much leſs Reaſons, about many conſiderable Things, of which he muſt have known the Truth [m]. Indeed it is ſo frequent in all Hiſtories for one Author to paſs over Things, even of great Conſequence, which another relates, that, if this were to be made

[k] *Joſephus*, in his own Life, §. 65. ſaith, "It is neceſſary, "that a Hiſtorian ſhould write Truth: but he may allowably "avoid charging on ſome Perſons their ill Actions with Bit-"terneſs; not for their Sakes, but for that of his own Mode-"ration." But he ſaith this, not in relation to *Herod*, but to excuſe himſelf for not having expoſtulated till then with *Juſtus*, on the Falſehoods contained in his Hiſtory of the Jewiſh War, publiſhed before that of *Joſephus*.

[l] Perhaps for a like Reaſon *Juſtus* never mentioned the Chriſtians, though they made no contemptible Figure then in *Paleſtine*.

[m] See Ottii Spicileg. in Joſeph.

a Ground

a Ground of Suſpicion concerning the Articles thus omitted; ſcarce any Author could preſerve his Credit, and certainly not *Joſephus*: for in very much of what he delivers, he ſtands entirely ſingle, and unſupported. Another material Conſideration is, that as he wrote long after St. *Matthew*, whoſe Goſpel muſt have been well known in *Judea*; he might, and ſurely would, have contradicted him in this Point, if he could: which he hath not.

It may be added further, that *Macrobius*, a *Roman* Writer, who lived indeed a conſiderable Time after both of them, in the Beginning of the fifth Century, but ſaith he compiled his Performance out of earlier Books; and who, by putting *Syria* inſtead of *Bethlehem*, ſhews, he did not borrow this Part from the New Teſtament; and who, being a Heathen, was not partial to the Goſpel Hiſtory; mentions *Herod*'s Murder of the Children, as a known Truth [n]. And his joining another Fact with it, which poſſibly happened at a Month's Diſtance from it, is by no Means enough to diſcredit his Teſtimony: which will be greatly confirmed, if we believe *Sixtus Senenſis*, a

[n] See, concerning theſe Particulars, Maſſon's Appendix to Biſhop Chandler's Vindication.

learned

learned Man, who lived two Centuries ago, and ſaith he read the ſame Account with that of *Macrobius*, in a Part, now loſt, of *Dion Caſſius*, a Pagan Hiſtorian, 100 Years older than *Macrobius* [o]. A Book alſo, of uncertain Date, written in *Hebrew* by a moſt virulent Jew, admits *Herod* to have done this Deed [p].

But whatever may be ſaid concerning the Omiſſion of it by others, poſſibly you may wonder, that all the Evangeliſts, excepting St. *Matthew*, ſhould omit it. For they all relate the ſame Matters, in ſeveral Inſtances of leſs Moment: but then theſe were chiefly, if not ſolely, Matters which came to paſs after our Saviour's public Teaching began, and at which they were preſent. St. *Luke* and St. *John* have each of them many Particulars, and even St. *Mark* hath ſome, which none of the reſt have. And plainly no one of them undertook to publiſh a complete Hiſtory of our Saviour's Life: but each wrote thoſe Occurrences, which he knew or remembered beſt, or judged the moſt needful to be inſerted in his Narrative. What the be-

[o] See Dr. Gregory Sharpe's Argument in Defence of Chriſtianity, p. 41.

[p] *Toldoth Jeſchu*, publiſhed by Huldrick at Leyden, 1705, 8vo. p. 11. 12. But perhaps he might take the Fact from St. Matthew, only perverting it, as he doth abſurdly, to his own Purpoſe.

loved

loved Diſciple ſaith of his own Goſpel, may be extended to each of the former. *Many other Things Jeſus did*, (and doubtleſs other Perſons did in Relation to him) *which are not written in this Book: but theſe are written, that ye may believe* [q]. The Fact now before us was not the moſt neceſſary to be known. Had St. *Matthew* likewiſe been ſilent about it, our Faith would ſtill have had abundantly ſufficient Evidence. But when he had related it, there was leſs Need, that the Goſpels, which came after, ſhould. And perhaps the greater Wonder is, that ſo many ſuch Things are repeated in them, than that ſo few are.

But hence ariſes one very natural and important Obſervation more: that St. *Matthew* could have no Temptation to forge a Story, which was no Way eſſential to his Deſign, and might have been ſo eaſily diſproved when he wrote, if it was not true; eſpecially, as he is underſtood to have written in *Judea*. Or, if he had been ſo raſh, the early Writers againſt Chriſtianity would have charged him with it, and the early Writers for it endeavoured to defend him: and there is not the leaſt Appearance of either.

[q] John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 25.

Still

Still one Circumſtance may ſeem attended with a Difficulty. Why ſhould *Herod* carry his Cruelty ſo far, as to ſlay all the Children *from two Years old and under*, when one Year, or half a Year, if not leſs, would have anſwered his End as well? Now here perhaps we commonly miſtake the Evangeliſt. For learned Men have held, that the original Word, tranſlated, *from two Years*, may mean, not, from two Years completed, but from two Years begun; from the Entrance into the ſecond Year. But if that be doubtful: yet *Herod*, notwithſtanding that he inquired exactly, when the Star appeared to the wiſe Men, could not be ſure, nor they tell him, whether it appeared to them exactly at the Birth of the Child, or ſome Time after it. Nor do we know, how long it might be after that Appearance, that they were able to ſettle their Affairs and begin their Journey; nor from what Diſtance they came, nor what Hindrances might happen in their Way; nor what Stay they might make at *Jeruſalem* before *Herod* ſent for them; and then, before he diſmiſſed them: nor conſequently, how old the Child was when they ſaw him. The Slaughter of the Innocents is

is appointed in our Calendar to be commemorated three Days after the Nativity. If that was ſuppoſed to be the real Time, the Meaning muſt have been, not to place it, or the Coming of the wiſe Men, prepoſterouſly, before the Appearance of the Star, which is fixed in our Calendar to the Twelfth Day, but to place it almoſt a Year after. And if the Child could either in Reality, or in *Herod*'s Imagination, be almoſt a Year old; a Wretch of ſuch unſpeakable Jealouſy as he was, and whoſe expreſs Character it is, in the Jewiſh Hiſtorian, rather to go too far in his Fears and Suſpicions, than fall ſhort [r], would by no Means think it ſafe, eſpecially in his Paſſion, to give an Order extending to much leſs than two Years.

Theſe, I think, are all the Objections and Doubts, that can well be raiſed in Relation to this Part of the Goſpel Narrative. And if any of them hath received a more ſatisfactory Anſwer, than it was beforehand imagined could be given; a modeſt and equitable Mind will be ready to conclude, that other Scripture Difficulties alſo may in all Likelihood be fairly ſolved, whether the particular Manner of doing it appear at preſent, or not.

[r] Ant. l. xvi. c. 8. §. 2.

It

It will now be aſked, What Uſe we are to make of this Piece of Hiſtory? And here perhaps it may be worth while juſt to obſerve, that in the firſt Place we ſhould be careful not to make a bad one. For a very bad and abſurd one hath been derived down, though I hope not to many of the preſent Generation, from the Times of Popiſh Ignorance: in which Perſons imagined, that the Day of the Week, on which Maſs was annually performed in Honour of theſe Children, thence called *Childermaſs* Day, was an unlucky one throughout the Year, and unfit for the Beginning of any Buſineſs. But what Shadow of Pretence is there, that, becauſe we commemorate then *Herod*'s doing a very wicked Thing, we ſhould abſtain from doing ſuch right and proper Things, as fall in our Way? Not only this Fancy, but all of this Kind, are utterly without Foundation in Reaſon, Scripture, primitive Chriſtianity, or daily Experience, if People will but mind what paſſes, with common Care and common Senſe. They ſerve to no one good Purpoſe whatever: they fetter the Hands of Perſons; and diſquiet their Minds with Superſtitions, which, at the ſame Time, are profane and irreligious, Fears

and

and Obſervances; as if the Providence of God did not always equally watch over us in our lawful Undertakings; but he had given ſome Days out of his own Hands into thoſe of the wicked one. Weak Minds, it is true, may fall into ſuch Errors inconſiderately without much Blame. But to caſt them off, when you are warned of the Nature of them, is an evident Duty. I proceed to the proper Uſes.

And ſurely one of them is, to obſerve, how pitiable they are, who live under the arbitrary Government of deſpotic Princes, that may do, as often as their Paſſions prompt them, the cruelleſt Actions without Controul; and to thank God from the Bottom of our Hearts, that we live in a Land of Law and Liberty, where no ſuch bloody Commands, as thoſe of *Herod*, can be iſſued forth: but we enjoy ſecurely whatever is dear to us; and the meaneſt, while innocent, hath nothing to fear from the greateſt. There are, at this Day, Countries in the World, where every thing lies at the Mercy of one bad Man: and on very ſlight Provocations, not only Children, but Men, Women and Children, are inſtantly deſtroyed at the Word of Command.

Another Point is, to take Notice, for a Caution to us, what amazing Lengths of Sin human Creatures are capable of going, unleſs they ſtop themſelves at firſt; eſpecially when Love of Power and Dominion hurries them on: and how poſſible it is, for the vileſt of Deſigns to be covered, as *Herod* did his, with Pretences of the utmoſt Zeal for Religion. Nor ſhould we omit to remark at the ſame Time, how painful the Agitations of an evil Heart muſt ſurely be, while it is working itſelf up to Reſolutions and Deeds of ſuch Horror, and how terrifying its Reflections afterwards. But eſpecially we ſhould dwell on this Meditation, which ariſes moſt naturally from the Subject before us, that oppoſing our own Wiſdom to that of Heaven is the groſſeſt of all Follies. Doubtleſs the crafty Monarch, when he gave out his Orders, applauded within himſelf more than a little the Prudence of this Maſter-Stroke: and deſpiſed the cowardly Politicians that have Scruples, and ſtop at half Way. But *why boaſteſt thou thyſelf, thou Tyrant, that thou canſt do Miſchief, whereas the Goodneſs of God endureth yet daily* [a]? Through that, wicked Men will always fail, either of the Point, at which they are aiming,

[a] Pſ. lii. 1, 2.

or of the Happineſs, which they expected from it. *Herod* failed even of the firſt. The Infants, whom he would have wiſhed to ſpare, he deſtroyed: the Infant, whom alone he wiſhed to deſtroy, eſcaped him. So he plunged himſelf into the deepeſt Guilt, and gave up his Memory to endleſs Infamy; and got nothing by it of what he hoped. Thus was he *mocked*, not ſo properly *of the wiſe Men*, though by Means of them, as of God himſelf; according to the Prediction, many Ages before, concerning him, and all reſembling him. *Why do the Heathen ſo furiouſly rage together, and the People imagine a vain Thing? The Kings of the Earth ſtand up, and the Rulers take Counſel together againſt the Lord, and againſt his anointed.—He, that dwelleth in Heaven, ſhall laugh them to ſcorn: the Lord ſhall have them in Deriſion*[t]. Nor was he diſappointed only, which he might know in this Life, though we are not ſure he did, but called ſoon after, in a dreadful and exemplary Manner, to his final Account: dying in all the Agonies of a Body tortured with a Complication of noiſome Diſeaſes, and a Soul driven to the Extremity of Fury and Deſpair: as the before-mentioned

[t] Pſ. ii. 1, 2, 4.

Hiſtorian, *Joſephus*, whoſe Teſtimony in this Particular cannot be ſuſpected, relates at large.

From ſuch Diſpenſations of Providence as this, and from the gracious Promiſes of God's holy Word, his Church, though tenderly affected by the Wickedneſs of its Perſecutors, as well as the frequent Sufferings of its Members, may yet learn to look beyond both, and contemplate with Triumph its own Security; the ſhameful Defeats of the former, and, even if they appear to ſucceed, the glorious Rewards of the latter. *The Virgin, the Daughter of Zion, hath deſpiſed thee, and laughed thee to ſcorn; the Daughter of Jeruſalem hath ſhaken her Head at thee* [u]. Hence the Days, on which the Apoſtles and others died Martyrs, have been joyfully obſerved as their Birth-Days: and ſhedding their Blood, conſidered as ſowing Seed for the future Increaſe of Believers. Hence alſo the Memory of theſe Infants hath been celebrated in the Aſſemblies of Chriſtians from the primitive Times: as we read in a Work, that hath been aſcribed to *Origen*, who lived 1500 Years ago [w]. For their Murder was regarded as a Martyrdom undergone by them in Deed, though not in Will; ſince they

[u] If. xxxvii. 22. [w] Hom. 3. in diverſos.

loſt

loſt their Lives on Chriſt's Account, and, as the Collect of our Church for this Feſtival expreſſes it, *glorified God by their Deaths*; were inſtrumental in making the Birth of his Son, and his watchful Care of him, remarkable in the higheſt Degree. And thus, conformably to the Pſalmiſt's Words [x], inſerted into the ſame Collect, God *ordained Strength*, gave additional Evidence to the Chriſtian Faith, and by ſo doing, *perfected Praiſe* [y] to his holy Name, even from the dying Cries, which proceeded *out of the Mouths of* theſe *Babes and Sucklings*.

Let us therefore likewiſe pay due Regard to their Memory: and look on it as their unſpeakable Happineſs, that they were ſent, on ſuch an Account, by the Tyrant's Sword, to Heaven, in the Morning of their Days, ſecure from the Danger of living to be wicked here, and miſerable hereafter. Let us alſo apply the ſame Conſideration to any ſimilar Affliction of our own: for we cannot undergo a ſeverer, and few, if any, upon Earth, have ever undergone ſo ſevere a one, as that of the poor Parents of theſe Children. Let us recollect from this inſtructive Leſſon, that the ſharpeſt Sufferings may fall on the moſt innocent Per-

[x] Pſ. viii. 2. [y] Matt. xxi. 16.

ſons; that the neareſt of our Relations, and deareſt of our Bleſſings, are God's Property more than our own; but that, if he takes them from us, he not only can, but, unleſs it be our Fault, will, make us ample Amends in a better World: and that therefore, though we may lawfully mourn the Loſs of them, yet we ought meekly to ſubmit to it; ſupported by the Hope of a bleſſed Reſurrection for them and ourſelves; and applying to our own Caſe, in a higher Senſe, what was originally ſaid, perhaps in a lower, to *Rachel, weeping for her Children: Thus ſaith the Lord, Reſtrain thy Voice from weeping, and thine Eyes from Tears: for thy Work ſhall be rewarded, and they ſhall come again from the Land of the Enemy* [a].

[a] Jer. xxxi. 15, 16.

SERMON VII.

PROVERBS xii. 22.

Lying Lips are Abomination to the Lord: but they, that deal truly, are his Delight.

NOtwithſtanding the Advantages of Reaſon, the Condition of Mankind would be very low, and indeed very unhappy, if we did not alſo excell the reſt of the Creatures, which inhabit this Earth, in a greater Power of communicating our Thoughts one to another. They have much fewer Wants: and are taught by Nature, almoſt immediately, how to ſupply them. But we are purpoſely formed to need and to give Help in every Thing, through the Whole of our Days: and therefore ſome ready and extenſive Method of ſignifying mutually whatever paſſes within our Minds was peculiarly neceſſary for us. Without this, no Perſon would have more Knowledge of any

Thing than he could attain of himſelf: or more Aſſiſtance in Diſtreſs from his Neighbour, than mere Conjecture would direct him to think needful, and unrequeſted Goodneſs incline him to beſtow. The Pleaſure alſo, as well as the Benefits of Society, would be reduced to a narrow Compaſs: and Life hang upon our Hands joyleſs and uncomfortable. But our gracious Maker hath furniſhed us with ſeveral Ways of doing what we find ſo requiſite. Our Actions and Geſtures declare our Meanings, in many Caſes, both clearly and ſtrongly; and our Looks have Significancy, inexpreſſible any other Way. The moſt intelligent of other Animals come not near us in either of theſe Reſpects. But yet articulate Speech, our more diſtinguiſhing Property, hath, on the Whole, much greater Pre-eminences belonging to it: and, together with the Improvement built upon it, of marking down Words with Eaſe in laſting Characters, hath raiſed us to a much higher Rank in the Scale of Beings, than we could otherwiſe have obtained.

Still unhappily, as every Bleſſing in the World may be fatally miſuſed, ſo there is hardly any one bad Purpoſe, which Language, though granted for the moſt excellent good Purpoſes,

Purpoſes, may not be, and hath not been, perverted to ſerve. But it ſerves the moſt ſuch, and the moſt effectually, by being turned from its original Deſign of giving right Information to thoſe, with whom we converſe, to the oppoſite one of leading them wrong: a Practice ſo immoral and miſchievous, yet ſo common; and ſo often ſeeming to be not only ſerviceable to the Deceivers themſelves, but defenſible, or however not very blameable, in Reſpect of ſuch as they deceive; that few Things are of more Importance, than forming juſt Notions concerning our Obligations to Veracity. And in doing this, though the principal Point is to reſtrain Men from taking over-great Liberties, yet they muſt be guarded alſo againſt over-great Scrupulouſneſs: both becauſe every Precept ought to be repreſented fairly; and becauſe, if this be not, ſome will be Sufferers by obſerving, and others feel Remorſe for tranſgreſſing, imaginary Duties; while much larger Numbers, perceiving the Rules given them to be in Part too ſtrict, will take Occaſion from thence to ſlight them all.

In order then to ſtate this whole Subject, I ſhall,

I. Shew

I. Shew, what Things are to be reputed Lies, and what not.

II. Conſider the Pleas, which are made to juſtify ſome Sorts of Lying.

III. Thoſe, which are brought to excuſe others.

I. The leading Queſtion therefore is, what Things are to be reputed Lies, and what not. Now here,

1. Since Actions and Geſtures, as well as Words, may be employed to expreſs what we think; they may be alſo employed to expreſs what we do not think: which is the Eſſence of a Lie. Indeed ſome of our Actions are naturally ſignificative: whereas few of our Words have any other Import, than arbitrary Conſent and Uſage give them; as appears from the different Languages of different Nations. But then we have never conſented to make our Actions in general Signs of our Intentions, as we have our Words. And if Perſons interpret an Action of ours to mean this or that, which hath no certain Meaning affixed to it, we deceive them not, but they deceive themſelves. Nor are we bound, in Point of Truth, to explain it, in order to prevent this: but in Point of Charity and Humanity we are, if we apprehend,

hend, that they may ſuffer any Harm by miſtaking, which we can obviate without ſuffering proportionable Harm in their Stead. Such Actions therefore, as have no determinate Senſe appropriated to them by Agreement, explicit or implied, can be no Violations of Sincerity: but ſuch as have, are ſubject to juſt the ſame Rules with Words; and we may be guilty of as groſs Falſehoods in the former, as in the latter.

2. Words having acquired their Significations by the mutual Acquieſcence of Mankind, may change them by the ſame Method. And not only ſingle Words may in Proceſs of Time vary their Senſe greatly, but Combinations of ſeveral Words may come to have Meanings, very different from what the Terms, of which they are compoſed, uninterpreted by Practice, would lead one to apprehend. We all know what it is to be *humble*, and to be a *Servant* to any one. But a Perſon, who, in the common Acceptation of the Words, taken ſeparately, cannot ſay he is either, may ſafely affirm that he is both, when they are joined together into an uſual Declaration of mere Civility. And in general, whatever Form of Speech, though falſe in its primitive Senſe, is

true

true in that, which Cuſtom hath adopted, may be uſed in it without Fault, to thoſe who underſtand it right: for there can be no Lie, where we have no Purpoſe of deceiving. But ſtill, though we may, and poſſibly in ſome Caſes muſt, comply with ſuch Phraſes, when once they are eſtabliſhed: yet the fewer of them prevail, the better, for ſeveral Reaſons.

The high ſtrained Expreſſions of Civility, which are ſo common, however innocent now, proceeded originally from a mean and fawning and fallacious Diſpoſition in thoſe who began them: and tended to nurſe up Vanity and Haughtineſs in thoſe, to whom they were addreſſed. In Proportion as they become Sayings of Courſe indeed, and loſe their Meaning, they may loſe their Miſchief. But if others of the ſame Sort are coined from Time to Time to ſucceed them, this renews and perpetuates the Miſchief; beſides the further Inconveniences of making a Language abſurd, and imprinting a Character of Slaviſhneſs upon it, under a groundleſs Pretence of refining and poliſhing it. For none of theſe Flights were admitted amongſt the beſt-bred People of the ancient World, till they had loſt their good Taſte, as well as their Virtue.

And

And as for the other Phraſes, of which Cuſtom hath changed or annihilated the Signification, though, after this is done, they are no longer Lies, yet they were Lies all the while it was doing: and every new Sep, taken in the ſame Road, will be a new Lie, till every Body finds it out, and learns the faſhionable Interpretation of it. And, as theſe Innovations cannot be ſoon received univerſally, they embarraſs and intangle timorous Minds very grievouſly, and tempt the irreſolute to do what they apprehend is not lawful: while, at the ſame Time, they give thoſe, who are not ſo ſcrupulous as they ſhould be, dangerous Encouragement to become leſs ſo than they were. For ſuch, perceiving themſelves authorized by general Practice, or perhaps being directed by particular Orders, to ſay in ſome Caſes Things that look extremely like Falſehoods, will eaſily go on to venture upon the moſt real Falſehoods in any Caſe, when they have Occaſion for them. Theſe Liberties therefore ſhould be as ſparingly uſed, and, when they muſt be uſed, as carefully explained to all who are concerned in them, as poſſible: and a very ſerious Attention ſhewn to prevent what a great and excellent

excellent Man calls, *our Language running into a Lie*[a].

3. As to all Figures of Speech, Fables, Allegories, feigned Hiſtories, and Parables, thoſe for Inſtance of our bleſſed Saviour, and others in Scripture, intended only to convey Inſtruction more agreeably or efficaciouſly, there is evidently no Room to condemn theſe, as Deceits. And whenever Things are either ſaid or written in ſuch a Manner, that the Intention is viſibly different from what the Words would elſe import, this can never be a Breach of Truth, and may ſometimes be a very proper and engaging Way of recommending it. But the Caſe is widely different, when Perſons, with all the Marks of Seriouſneſs, affirm what they will afterwards deſpiſe and ridicule others for believing. Theſe are plainly deſigned Falſehoods: and in a greater Degree, or a leſs, injurious ones. When they do no worſe, they put Mens Underſtandings, and Tempers too, on a ſevere Trial, without the leaſt Right or Need: and, which determines the Nature of them very clearly, if the Hearer doth not expoſe himſelf, the Speaker is diſ-

[a] Abp. Tillotſon.

appointed.

appointed. Surely this is *fooliſh Talking, and Jeſting not convenient* [b]. Nor however little Hurt it may ſometimes do, is the Sentence at all too ſevere in general, which the wiſe King hath paſſed upon it: *As a Madman, who caſteth Firebrands, Arrows, and Death; ſo is the Man, who deceiveth his Neighbour, and ſayeth, Am I not in Sport* [c]?

4. Concerning ambiguous Phraſes, which in one Acceptation expreſs our Meaning truly, but in another do not; it muſt be obſerved, that when we are bound, by Promiſe or otherwiſe, to declare what we know or believe in any Caſe, we are bound to declare it in ſuch Terms, as are likely to be well underſtood: elſe we fail of what we profeſs, or ought to do. And, even when we are not thus bound, we ſhould ſpeak of Things, if we can ſafely, with Plainneſs and Simplicity. For not only this adds greatly to the Agreeableneſs and Inſtructiveneſs of Converſation; but, which brings it under the preſent Subject, dark and doubtful Sayings often deceive People to their Detriment, and are too often deſigned to produce that Effect. Yet ſtill there may be Reaſon for Reſervedneſs towards ſome

[b] Eph. v. 4. [c] Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

Perſons,

Perſons, even in Trifles. For they, who take the Liberty of aſking any Queſtions, that may ſerve their Turn, will commonly diſcover almoſt as much from the Silence of one, who is uſually communicative to them, as from his ſpeaking. And whenever, after all our Precaution, Silence will not conceal a Thing, which ought to be concealed, it muſt be allowable to ſpeak upon the Subject in ſuch a Manner, as to leave that Part of it involved in Obſcurity, which is not fit to be revealed. Nay, though we foreſee it to be probable, that any one, provided he hath no Title to Information from us, will take our Words in a Senſe, in which we do not uſe them; yet if that, in which we do uſe them, be a fair and natural one, and Nothing but his own Raſhneſs leads him into Error; though, as I ſaid before, Charity bids us hinder it, if we conveniently can, yet Veracity requires it not. For when we deſign only to keep him ignorant of a Fact, it is his own Fault, if he will alſo believe a Fancy. But if we go further and lay Snares for him; if we give Aſſurances, which, in their obvious and univerſal Acceptation, are falſe, but only have a latent forced Conſtruction, in which, after all, they juſt may be

true: this is Equivocation; and cannot be defended, unleſs the groſſeſt Violations of Sincerity can be defended too. For the Intent of uſing Language to deceive is equally evident in both: and the Contrivance of couching the Deceit in Phraſes liable to no Suſpicion, adds to the Crime greater Deliberation, and conſequently more heinous Guilt.

We are now therefore led to conſider,

II. The Pleas, which are urged to juſtify ſome Sorts of direct Lying.

For more than a few ſpeculative, and ſome pious Men, have imagined, that this Practice in certain Caſes may do much Good, and can do no Hurt: and then is both allowable and commendable. Speech, they ſay, was given to Mankind ſolely for their common Benefit: nor conſequently is it ever uſed amiſs, when it contributes to that End. And this Opinion they endeavour to confirm by ſeveral Inſtances of Falſehoods, which good Perſons are recorded in Scripture to have uttered knowingly. But, beſides that ſome Inſtances, which they produce, are not Falſehoods, or were directed by an expreſs Authority, which can ſuperſede ordinary Obligations: good Perſons may too poſſibly both ſay and do what they

ought not, through Ignorance of their Duty, or Infirmity; and their Commiſſion of known and great Sins is not always related with Cenſure, it being unneceſſary: to which it muſt be added, that ſome of their Actions may be praiſed in holy Writ on the Whole, without the leaſt Intention of approving the Circumſtances of Inſincerity, or other Imperfections, with which they were accompanied.

Another Argument in Favour of their Notion they draw, ſomewhat ſurpriſingly, from the Apoſtle's Words: *putting away Lying, ſpeak every Man Truth with his Neighbour: for we are Members one of another* [d]. The Precept, they ſay, muſt not be extended further, than the Reaſon of it extends: which being only, that becauſe of our mutual Relation, we ought to conſult our mutual Advantage; where adhering to Truth will not promote this, Falſehood may be juſtly ſubſtituted. But, though mutual Advantage is a very ſtrong Tie upon us to ſpeak Truth, St. *Paul* hath not told us here, that it is the only one. And we experience ourſelves to be under another more immediate. We feel a natural Reluctance in our Conſciences to lying

[d] Eph. iv. 25.

and

and deceiving, as ſuch, without looking forward to Conſequences: and even they who have perſuaded themſelves that doing it is, in ſome Inſtances, lawful, cannot do it however, without an inward Senſe of Shame and Guilt. Now it deſerves to be well conſidered, whether tranſgreſſing, in order to attain ſome ſuppoſed End of general Utility, this Dictate of our moral Nature, the Principle of which God hath planteth there, be any more allowable, than tranſgreſſing the Dictates of Juſtice or any other moral Obligation, with the ſame View: whether, in ſhort, it be not, what the Apoſtle himſelf mentions with Abhorrence, and that in the very Caſe of a Lie, *Doing Evil, that Good may come* [e].

Or, though ſtill any one ſhould think, that our native Antipathy to ſpeaking Falſehood, no more proves it to be always forbidden, than our Unwillingneſs to give others Pain, which notwithſtanding we may and muſt give them ſometimes, for the Sake of a Benefit more conſiderable: yet it muſt be obſerved, that the Scripture both allows and requires Pain and even Death to be inflicted in ſome Caſes: but uniformly forbids Lying,

[e] Rom. iii. 7, 8.

without intimating in any one Precept or Declaration concerning it, the Poſſibility of an Exception. But were the Conſideration of Scripture to be ſet aſide, which it never ought; ſtill on the Footing of mere Reaſon and Experience, a moſt important Queſtion would remain, what thoſe Inſtances are, in which, on balancing the two Sides of the Account, Violation of Truth is more beneficial than detrimental to Mankind. For ſuppoſing any ſuch can be found, it muſt be violated in them only. But if none ſuch can be found, or if the Advantage be at all doubtful, or not exceeding great, or attainable any other Way, in the ſame or but nearly the ſame Degree: the plain and the ſafe Rule evidently is, that of *Simplicity and godly Sincerity* [f] in all Caſes.

The Caſe indeed of an Attack upon our own or our Neighbours Property, or Life, may ſeem a very favourable one to the Opinion, which we are now examining. For here it is argued, that aſſuredly no one hath a Right to rob or to murder; nor conſequently ſuffers any Wrong, when he is prevented from doing either. And if telling him a Falſehood be the likelieſt Method of Prevention: hath he

[f] 2 Cor. i. 12.

not

not forfeited all Claim to our telling him Truth? And is it not much better in every View, that he ſhould be deceived, than accompliſh his wicked Purpoſes? Why, undoubtedly it ſeems very hard, eſpecially upon the Party endangered, to ſay otherwiſe. Yet this may and ought to be ſaid, that on the one Hand, all the little Good, which a Lie, that will ſcarce be credited, hath any Chance for doing, may commonly with Prudence be done without it, either by avoiding to anſwer, or by general and undetermined Anſwers, which are very different Things from Untruths: and that on the other Hand, inſtead of Good, a Lie may do much Harm: as the vile Wretches who attempt to commit ſuch Crimes, when they have once or twice found themſelves, or others like them, impoſed upon, may be provoked by it to grow much more ſuſpicious and barbarous, than they would have been elſe. Therefore it may be doubted whether, in the Main, Tranſgreſſion of Truth, even in theſe Circumſtances, prevents or produces Miſchief. Surely then he, who refuſes to tranſgreſs it, acts a worthier Part: and, if he ſuffers any Thing on that Account, he ſuf-

fers it *for* the Sake of *a good Conſcience towards God* [g].

Another Caſe is that of Enemies in War: whom having a Right to kill, it is ſaid, we cannot but have a Right to deceive, that being the ſmaller Hurt of the two. And yet, not only ſuch Deceivers are treated with peculiar Severity in War, as worſe than common Enemies; but Faith muſt be preſerved, even in the Midſt of Arms: elſe a State of Hoſtility would be yet more calamitous than it is, and beſides would be endleſs too. For Overtures of Truce or Peace could have no Effect, if no Confidence remained between the contending Parties. Add to this, that if one Side may deceive, the other may: and ſo neither is in a better Condition, than if both abſtained from it: and indeed the Attempt of it by both, will for the moſt Part be ineffectual [h].

A third Caſe, in which many plead for the Lawfulneſs of making free with Truth, is in dealing with thoſe, who have either loſt

[g] 1 Pet. ii. 19. iii. 21.

[h] *Polyb.* l. xiii. p. 671. condemns Deceit in Princes and Generals, even againſt Enemies: which he ſaith the *Achaians* uſed not, and the *Romans* not much. He adds, p. 673. that Truth always gets the better of Falſehood ſooner or later.

in a great Meaſure the Uſe of their Underſtandings, or are not yet ſufficiently arrived to it. For it is argued, that theſe have no Title to conduct themſelves, becauſe they have no Ability of doing it: and ſince the only Service, that Truth can do them, is conducting them properly; and inſtead of that, it will often only diſcompoſe them, and make them refractory: if employing Falſehood will lead them on quietly in the right Way, it can be no Injury, and may be a great Advantage to them. But conſider; Perſons naturally weak, or, through Infirmities, decayed, in their Intellects, may be managed, with a little Skill and Care, intirely to their Satisfaction, or however may ſoon be pacified again, by Methods very conſiſtent with Sincerity. And they, whoſe Diſorder is a Species of Madneſs, are not only for the moſt Part incredibly jealous, but more ſagacious too, than is often imagined: And to what Degrees, both of Rage and Violence, Deceits, attempted upon them and detected, will drive them, can ſcarce be credited. Whereas plain Dealing, if proper Authority be mildly aſſumed along with it, will generally ſoon ſubdue them once for all; moſt of them ſubmitting readily to it from a ſecret

Conſciouſneſs of their own State. Then as to Children: it is true, they are eaſily cheated, and ſo for a while eaſily quieted. But what follows? That they quickly come to ſee through theſe Artifices, and then are much more intractable than before, and quite outrageous on the very Apprehenſion of your repeating them. Your Credit with them is loſt, the next Time you want to uſe it for their Good: and their ſole Aim for the future is to deceive the Deceiver, gratify their own Inclinations, and carry their own Ends. Now treating them with Fairneſs and Steadineſs, telling them only ſo much as was proper, but Nothing that they ſhould ever find to be otherwiſe than they were told, would have totally different Effects: would teach them betimes to hear Reaſon and yield to it; would prevent their agitating themſelves with perpetual Fits of Paſſion, by ſhewing them clearly, what they were to expect, what they were to conſider as unfit; and, which is a much greater Benefit ſtill, would habituate them from the firſt to Integrity and Honeſty in their own Behaviour: whereas perhaps one of their chief Inducements to that vile Trick of Lying; of which moſt of them get ſomething, and too

many ſo much, that they never leave it; is what really makes their Condition a pitiable one: that they learn it originally from its being uſed towards themſelves by thoſe, who afterwards reprove and puniſh them for it.

The laſt Caſe, which I ſhall mention, is that of ſick Perſons: concerning whom it is alledged, that common good Nature directs us to conceal from them ſometimes, be it ever ſo much at the Expence of Truth, the real Name of their Diſeaſe, the Danger of their Situation, the Sort of Medicines given them, and all Facts of all Kinds, which, if known, might deject or diſturb them: for that not only ſuch Deceit is uſeful, but they upon whom it is practiſed, will, when recovered, approve it, and be thankful for it; nay, perhaps have already approved it, and ſet the Example of it on former like Occaſions, and therefore have in Effect conſented to it now. But, plauſible as this Plea may appear, the Need and the Benefit of employing Falſehood, even in theſe Circumſtances, for the moſt Part at leaſt, *cometh of Evil*[1]. It is becauſe People will not in the Time of their Health become virtuous and reaſonable, pious and

[1] Matth. v. 37.

reſigned,

reſigned, that they want the wretched Support of Untruths in the Time of Sickneſs. And if they, who are about them, ſcruple to ſupport them thus, as they well may, then they are void of all Conſolation. But even ſuppoſing the Lies, which they wiſh for, are told them; they will ſeldom be told ſo, as neither to be found out, nor ſuſpected: and Suſpicions will often diſturb ſick Perſons more fatally, than knowing the worſt would. Or, let Prevarications of this Kind work ever ſo happy Effects on ſome particular Occaſions, yet there follows a moſt dreadful general Inconvenience from them: that becauſe ſome muſt needs be told their Condition is hopeful and ſafe, though it be not; others are told in vain, that theirs is ſo, though it be; for their Friends, they think, will affirm any Thing, to pleaſe them. And thus, no more may recover by being deceived, than may be loſt by the Impoſſibility, ariſing from hence, of knowing that they are not deceived. Their Lives may depend on the Compoſedneſs of their Spirits: their Spirits would have been compoſed, if they could have believed thoſe who attend them: but being ſenſible what Liberties they will take in theſe Matters, they

cannot

cannot believe them; and therefore can have no Relief or Comfort from their Aſſurances.

However, it muſt be owned, that in moſt or all of the abovementioned Caſes, there are ſometimes Difficulties, with which we have much more Cauſe to pray God we may never be tried, than to be confident that we ſhall judge and act rightly, if we are. And therefore, though adhering ſtrictly to Truth, as the Rule, which our Maker hath given us, and truſting Him with the Conſequences, evidently appears to be the ſecureſt Way: yet, if any one ventures to deviate from it with a viſibly good Intention, we ſhould not, I think, pronounce a ſevere Sentence upon him, conſidering how prone the beſt of us is to err in plainer Things; always provided, that the Liberties, which he takes, be few and modeſt, and almoſt extorted from him; and conſcientiouſly reſtrained to Things in themſelves the leaſt exceptionable. But if Perſons, becauſe ſomething may be colourably ſaid for making a little free with Truth on very uncommon Occaſions, where no one ſeems injured by it, will indulge themſelves in whatever Falſities

they

they pleaſe on almoſt any Occaſion: if, becauſe it hath been apprehended, that Malefactors, and thoſe with whom we are at War, have no Right to Veracity; and that ſuch, as are incapable of judging at all for themſelves, may be deceived for their Advantage by others; if, I ſay, upon this, they will imagine they are allowed to treat one Part of Mankind as Villains and Enemies, with whom no Faith is to be kept, and another as Children and Fools, upon whom they may freely impoſe any Way: this muſt proceed from a bad Heart; and the Tendency of it is, to diſſolve intirely the Bonds of human Society, and open a high Road to all poſſible Wickedneſs and univerſal Confuſion. The Arguments, were they ever ſo ſpecious, for the Lawfulneſs of Fraud in ſeemingly harmleſs Caſes, can never prove it lawful in others of a Nature quite contrary. But, I beg it may be obſerved, the extreme Danger, which there is notwithſtanding, of Mens proceeding in Falſehood to very pernicious Lengths, if once they begin, is a moſt unanſwerable Objection againſt its being permitted in any Degree at all.

A Con-

A Conſideration ſo intereſting muſt be urged more at large: and ſhall, God willing, the next Opportunity. But I hope you have already ſeen very great Reaſon to follow the Son of *Sirach*'s wiſe Counſel. *Uſe not to make any Manner of Lie: for the Cuſtom thereof is not good*[k].

[k] Eccluſ vii. 13.

SERMON VIII.

PROV. xii. 22.

Lying Lips are Abomination to the Lord: but they, that deal truly, are his Delight.

AS the Advantages, derived to Mankind from the ſuperior Power, which we enjoy, of communicating our Thoughts one to another, are very great; ſo the Perverſion of it to wrong Uſes is very pernicious. And no Perverſion of it can be ſo complete, as when we employ it, inſtead of informing others, to deceive them. Now, of the more Importance it is, that we ſhould not be guilty of this Crime, the more neceſſary it muſt be, that we ſhould know, wherein it conſiſts, and how inſufficient the Pleas are, which in ſome Circumſtances have been made in its Favour.

There-

Therefore I began to diſcourſe on the Subject of our Obligation to Truth, by ſhewing,

I. What Things are, and are not, Breaches of it.

II. What Breaches are unwarrantably by ſome Perſons thought juſtifiable.

And under this latter Head, I firſt proved, that Scripture enjoins Veracity, without authorizing any Exceptions, and that indeed it is, in its own Nature, a Duty, independently of Conſequences: then I confuted or counterbalanced the good Effects aſcribed to the Violation of it in ſeveral particular Caſes: and laſtly, intimated the general Danger, to which they who depart from it, expoſe themſelves, and tempt others, of running on from one Liberty to another, till at Length they venture to ſay, and afterwards to do, any Thing, which they imagine will contribute to a good End: a Practice productive of ſuch dreadful Evils, that I muſt enlarge upon it ſomewhat further.

Things, which every one allows to be good, no one needs to be cheated into. And where Opinions differ, neither God nor Man hath given us a Right to bring over others into

our

our own by Falſehood: and on what Foundation then can we take ſuch a Step? I may think perhaps, that this or that Thing would be for the Benefit of the World, or of ſuch a Part of it, or Individual in it. But this no more empowers me to uſe Fraud, than to uſe Force, for accompliſhing it. Another Perſon may think, at the ſame Time, a different or a contrary Thing beneficial: and may have as high an Eſteem of his own Judgement, as I have of mine. If then I may employ Deceit to ſerve my Purpoſe, why not he to ſerve his? Now what can this end in, but the Ruin of all Integrity, and all Confidence, amongſt Men? And what Good can there be in View, that bears any Proportion to ſuch a Calamity?

But ſome argue: Our Oppoſers will certainly uſe Falſehood for their bad Ends: if therefore we do not uſe it for our good ones, they have a plain Advantage over us; and we ſhall be undone, for Want of turning their own Weapons againſt them. Now if this were the Caſe; it would only be the Caſe of ſuffering for Truth, which is ſuffering for God: and hereafter, at leaſt, no one will be a Loſer by that. But indeed, at preſent, upon the Whole,

the contrary is the Caſe. If your Oppoſers have Recourſe to unfair Arts, detect thoſe Arts in them, and abſtain from them yourſelves: and, whatever Difficulties you may be under for a Time, in the Concluſion all will come out well. *A lying Tongue is but for a Moment: but the Lip of Truth ſhall be eſtabliſhed for ever*[a]. Uprightneſs, with only common Prudence, will not fail to get the better at Length: and the Reaſon, why we experience it no oftener, is indeed that we try it ſo ſeldom. In the Midſt of our Complaints, we do the very Things, of which we complain. This is no Combat of fair Dealing againſt unfair, but of Craft againſt Craft: and perhaps our own Artifices contribute more, than thoſe of our Adverſaries, towards the Loſs of our Cauſe. For the ſureſt Way of miſſing our Aim is to ſink in our Credit. Therefore let the End, that we propoſe, be ever ſo good, it is neither right nor wiſe to uſe Falſehoods for attaining it.

But, in Fact, the Ends propoſed to be ſerved by this Method, fall uſually very far ſhort of being near ſo good, as they are pretended to be. Some blameable Gratification,

[a] Prov. xii. 19.

ſome

ſome worldly Intereſt, ſome party Point, the Promotion of ſome bad or doubtful Cauſe, is the Thing, which People, on ſuch Occaſions, have at Heart, however ſtudiouſly they diſguiſe their Aims to others, and, if poſſible, to themſelves. Theſe are the Purpoſes, for which Truth is to be depreſſed, Impoſture countenanced; ſome conſidered as too weak, others as too wicked, to be treated with common Honeſty. And thus every one, who can but think hardly enough of thoſe, from whom he differs, ſets himſelf at Liberty to ſpeak to them, or of them, as inſincerely as ever he will. And if he may venture upon falſe Aſſertions; he will be apt to think, why not upon falſe Oaths? And, if for the Service of the Public or his Friends, why not for his own? How ſhocking a State of Things would this introduce! Hear the Prophet's Deſcription of it: *They bend their Tongues, like their Bow, for Lies; but they are not valiant for the Truth upon the Earth: for they proceed from Evil to Evil, and they know not me, ſaith the Lord. Take ye Heed every one of his Neighbour; and truſt ye not in any Brother: for every Brother will utterly ſupplant, and every Neighbour will walk with Slanders. And they will deceive*

every one his Neighbour, and will not ſpeak the Truth: they have taught their Tongue to ſpeak Lies, they weary themſelves to commit Iniquity. Thine Habitation is in the Midſt of Deceit: through Deceit they refuſe to know me, ſaith the Lord [b].

Nay further yet, if Perſons may falſify and perjure, where ſhall they ſtop? It will be ſaid, why not purloin, why not rob, why not murder, to ſerve a good Purpoſe, that is, a convenient one, for others, or themſelves? Each Liberty taken leads on, by a plain high Road, to a greater: and obſerve, I intreat you, what a Figure they make together in the Word of God. *By ſwearing, and lying, and killing, and ſtealing, and committing Adultery, they break out, and Blood toucheth Blood. Therefore ſhall the Land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein ſhall languiſh* [c].

But could we reſtrain the Advocates for Falſehood, and their Diſciples, to this Offence only, and even to the ſeemingly more innocent Sorts of it: yet real Religion, real Virtue, the real Happineſs of Mankind, I believe have never on the Whole been ſerved by ſuch Arts: and ſeldom, if ever, hath it been deſigned

[b] Jer. ix. 3—6. [c] Hoſ. iv. 2, 3.

that

that they ſhould. Superſtition indeed, and Enthuſiaſm, have been greatly promoted by them: and Infidelity not a little. For the Lies framed in Favour of Religion have ſtrangely diſcredited the Truths urged in Favour of it. And beſides, as ſome have thought it uſeful, and therefore allowable, to affirm whatever would conduce to the Propagation of orthodox Belief: others, on the ſame Principle, have thought it as allowable to do the ſame Thing for the Propagation of Unbelief. And, as the former have counted Nothing too bad to be reported of thoſe, whom they deemed the Enemies of the Faith: ſo the latter have thought ſcarce any Thing, either too opprobrious to be ſaid, or too improbable to be ſwallowed, in Relation to the Teachers and Advocates of it. One Side exclaims againſt religious, the other againſt irreligious, Frauds; and ſo far as either are committed, both are in the Right: but both lamentably overlook the obvious Rule; that neither ſhould impute them unjuſtly, and neither be guilty of them at all. The Miſchiefs of the Falſehoods invented to decry Revelation are as plain, as, (what ſurely admits no Doubt) its Importance to the outward Tranquility, the inward Peace,

the preſent, the future Welfare of Men. And the Sinfulneſs of Falſehoods to ſupport it, cannot be more ſtrongly expreſſed, than in the Words of *Job: Hear now my Reaſonings, and hearken to the Pleadings of my Lips. Will ye ſpeak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him?—Is it good, that He ſhould ſearch you out? or as one Man mocketh another, do ye ſo mock him?—Shall not his Excellency make you afraid, and his Dread fall upon you*[d] *?*

Thus far I have ſpoken concerning the Lies, which to ſome have ſeemed lawful. And now I proceed to ſpeak

III. Of ſuch, as too many are apt to account excuſable.

They own them to be in Strictneſs faulty; but extenuate the Fault in their Imagination, till it comes to appear little or nothing; and then venture upon them as freely, as if they were expreſsly permitted.

Thus, for Inſtance, when Perſons have done amiſs, and want to conceal it, if deviating a little from Truth will have that Effect, and keep all quiet; they fancy it is a tolerably harmleſs Method of preventing, at a cheap Rate, a good deal of Anger or Contempt in

[d] Job xiii. 6, 7, 9, 11.

others,

others, and Shame, if not further Inconveniences, to themſelves: But ſurely they ought to conſider, that having committed one blameable Action, which perhaps is but a Folly, can never give them a Privilege of committing a ſecond, which is a Sin. Beſides, very few wrong Things are done, but ſome Body hath a Right to inquire into them, and be made acquainted with them. Now denying them to ſuch, is plainly injurious to them: and according to the Nature of the Caſe, may be highly prejudicial. Nay, Perſons who have no Title to any Information, are intitled however not to be miſled by falſe Information: which often may do them Diſſervice in many Ways. Further, the Hope of hiding Faults thus, encourages the Commiſſion of them beyond all Things: till there is hardly any Wickedneſs, that ſome poor Wretches will not venture upon; becauſe they imagine there is hardly any from which they cannot clear themſelves pretty well, in the Opinion of others, by a few round Aſſertions or Denials, that ſeem to coſt them little. But indeed Nothing in the World coſts them ſo dear, as this vile Practice: for it continually accumulates freſh

Guilt upon them, engages them deeper, and entangles them more inextricably in bad Ways; till they neither know how to mend, nor to get it believed, if they do. Commonly they are detected ſoon, always at laſt: and the older Offenders they are, before that happens, the heavier Load of Diſgrace and Diſcredit falls upon them. But ſuppoſing they are able intirely to remove all Suſpicion from themſelves: they well know, (which is a dreadful Aggravation of their Crime,) that ordinarily ſpeaking, it muſt light on others, who are innocent. Nay, too frequently they are led on, (for the Temptation, when once they have begun, is a dangerous one) to charge others in order to acquit themſelves; or at leaſt to inſinuate concerning them what they are not bold enough to affirm.

The Sin of Falſehood therefore, on theſe Occaſions, being ſo miſchievous and enſnaring, we ſhould be very cautious not to drive into it thoſe, who are under our Influence, by Severity when they happen to miſbehave: but paſs over ſlight Failings with a moderate Notice, if any; and grant them an eaſy Pardon for weightier ones, on a penitent Acknowledgement

ledgement of them. Only we muſt not allow them to impoſe upon us by a pretended Sincerity and Concern, that produce no Effect. For if once they learn a Habit of doing wrong without Fear, becauſe coming and owning it will ſet all right again; we ſhall have no longer any Authority over them, or Hold upon them. Nay, in a little Time, they will come to flatter themſelves that God will be as weakly forgiving as we are. And no Error can be more fatal, than to imagine, that with Him mere Confeſſion will ſupply the Place of Reformation.

Another Occaſion, on which Perſons are very apt to think Violation of Truth excuſable in themſelves and their Friends, though they exclaim againſt it vehemently when they ſuffer by it, is in ſpeaking ill of thoſe, who have injured or provoked them. Aſperſing others in cool Blood, is condemned as univerſally as it is practiſed. But when any one hath been the Aggreſſor; and ſo, we conceive, deſerved it from us; (and truly a very trifling, or even imaginary Offence, will deſerve, in the Eſtimation of ſome People, the bittereſt Returns;) then we are ſtrangely inclined to load them with

with whatever Accuſations we can hope to get believed, and ſometimes more. Not only what we have no ſufficient Cauſe to think true, but what we have abundant Cauſe to think falſe, we are tempted to ſay of them at ſuch Times; and fancy it is almoſt a Juſtification of us, if we can plead, that we did not begin. Yet perhaps we did, if the Caſe were fairly ſtated. But ſuppoſing the contrary: Is there any Pretence for our turning Liars and Slanderers, becauſe others are inconſiderately, or even deſignedly injurious? May not we thus eaſily become as bad or worſe than they? Is it not the ſure Method of exaſperating, and perpetuating, Enmity? And why ſhould we not rather acquire the Approbation of God and of our own Hearts, the Eſteem of the World and of our Adverſaries themſelves, by treating their Reputations with generous Tenderneſs?

But be it ever ſo wrong to ſpeak ill of others falſely, yet ſpeaking a little too well of any one, we may imagine, can never be much blamed: an Act of ſo much Good-nature may ſeem almoſt a meritorious Tranſgreſſion. But, in Reality, beſides that doing this by no Means proceeds always from Benevolence, but too commonly

monly from intereſted Views, or even malicious Purpoſes; let it proceed from what it will, it often produces moſt lamentable bad Effects. By raiſing Perſons Characters, or magnifying their Circumſtances beyond Truth, you may induce others to enter into Engagements with them, or to repoſe Confidences in them, that may prove very fatal: you may occaſion their being employed in Affairs of Importance, to which they are unequal; whence dreadful Miſchiefs have come: you may, by exalting them, be the Means of diſappointing, depreſſing, ruining their much worthier Rivals: And you contribute to annihilate that Diſtinction between one Man and another, which public Welfare, no leſs than private Juſtice, requires to be kept up. Therefore, though, doubtleſs, we ought to be chiefly cautious what Harm we ſay of our Neighbours; yet, in ſome Caſes eſpecially, we ought to be very cautious too, what Good we ſay of them, though ſtill we ſhould charitably hope and believe as much, as with any Reaſon we can.

And as deſignedly giving People a better Character to others than they merit, is not excuſable: ſo neither is extolling to themſelves their Virtues or Accompliſhments beyond the due

due Bounds, be it by groſs Flattery, or by refined; though Pleas are urged for it, both as demanded by the Rules of Civility, (whereas indeed theſe Rules are very conſiſtent with thoſe of Sincerity) and as the Way to make them become what they are told they are. Now, on the contrary, this is the Way to make them think they need neither to amend nor improve; to fill their Hearts with Vanity, and their Behaviour with Inſolence; to encourage them in their favourite Follies and Vices; and thus lead them into Diſeſteem and Wretchedneſs. The Commendation which Perſons deſerve ſhould very ſeldom be given them fully to their Faces: but giving them more, and perſuading them they are already in rightful Poſſeſſion of that high Character, which they ſhould only be taught to aim at, and at moſt to hope for in due Time, generally proceeds from weak Fondneſs or intereſted Baſeneſs; and rarely intends, and ſcarce ever doth them any Good.

Another Caſe, in which the Speaking of Untruths is conſidered in a Light much too favourable by the Parties, who fancy they find their Account in it, is that of Trade. For they alledge, that though, undoubtedly, it is very unhappy and very wrong; yet, in Fact, Falſe-

hood hath prevailed in this Part of human Affairs to ſuch a Degree, that Veracity cannot ſupport itſelf: they muſt do as others do, or they muſt be ruined. Now indeed there is no Queſtion, but wicked People have thrown many Difficulties in the Way of ſuch, as elſe would be honeſt. And *Woe unto them, by whom the Offence*, for it is a dangerous one, *cometh*[e]: who, making Advantages of Fraud, bring Diſadvantages on Uprightneſs. But ſtill the Neceſſity of Prevarication in order to thrive is merely a Pretence, of bad Perſons originally, by which others have too eaſily ſuffered themſelves to be deceived, and ſo adopted it. A *lying Tongue* may carry ſome Points: but will not *the Lip of Truth* gain Ground of it upon the Whole? Is it Nothing, or is it not the greateſt of all Things, that we muſt love to deal with them, in whom we find that we can place Confidence? It is both ſafer and eaſier. And thus, though they may have Inconveniences to ſtruggle through at firſt; yet, when once they have eſtabliſhed a Character, the Benefits of it will be certain and durable. Doubtleſs many a fair Trader hath failed: but then ſome accidental great Loſs, or Want of Skill, or of Prudence,

[e] Matth. xviii. 7.

or

or Diligence, or obliging Behaviour, hath been the Cauſe; and ſeldom, if ever, his Integrity. The Reputation of that, which cannot be ſecured without the Reality, gives Men great Pre-eminence above their Equals, nay, above their Superiors, in other Reſpects. But even were adhering to Truth diſadvantageous upon the Balance of worldly Conſiderations, yet ſurely it is far better to bear this Inconvenience patiently, and make ourſelves Amends for it by greater Induſtry and Frugality, than to infringe a plain Duty, and offend our Maker. Let Falſehoods be ever ſo common and ſucceſsful in all Buſineſs, and perhaps peculiarly in ſome: this alters not our Obligation. It may moderate our Cenſures of others: but it cannot give a Latitude to us in our own Behaviour. *That which is altogether juſt ſhalt thou follow*, ſaith the Scripture [f]: and *Thou ſhalt not follow a Multitude to do Evil* [g]. Nay, to put one of the hardeſt Caſes, if any Perſon, in ſelling me any Thing, hath impoſed upon me ever ſo much by Falſehood: that doth not give me the leaſt Right to impoſe on another, even in the very ſame Affair. I have been deceived: but this no more authorizes me to deceive the next Perſon I deal with,

[f] Deut. xvi. 20. [g] Exod. xxiii. 2.

than

than having been robbed authorizes me to aſſault and plunder the next Man I meet. The Frequency of Frauds, and the Temptations that ariſe from thence, are very ſtrong Reaſons for adding great Prudence to our Innocence; for being much on our Guard, in what Profeſſions we engage or continue, with whom we have Tranſactions, to what Employments we put out thoſe, who are under our Care: but they are no Manner of Reaſon, why we ſhould look on the Dealings of Man with Man only as a fair Trial of unfair Skill, and contribute to make the World worſe, becauſe it is ſo bad already.

One Obſervation further I would make under this Head, that, of the more Importance the Preſervation of Sincerity in Buſineſs is, the more we ought to avoid inticing and almoſt forcing thoſe, with whom we have commercial Concerns, into Inſincerity, in order to ſatisfy and pleaſe us: we ſhould allow them to make, and to own they make, reaſonable Profits; we ſhould yield to Truth, when we have Cauſe to think we hear it; and encourage it by favourable Treatment, where-ever we ſee it.

Another Occaſion, mentioned already, and deſerving it again, on which too many reckon

Lies excuſable, is, when they are told to entertain the Company. The End being ſo innocent, and laudable, a ſmall Irregularity in the Means, they hope, may ſurely be overlooked. But this Entertainment is commonly given at the Expence of more Perſons than one. It ſeldom fails, but ſomebody or other is miſrepreſented to his Detriment or Diſcredit. He is certainly injured. They who are miſled to a wrong Judgement about him, nay about any Thing, may be injured by it not a little. The facetious Perſon himſelf, who takes theſe Liberties in Converſation, whatever Applauſe he may gain from the inconſiderate, muſt never expect any ſerious Eſteem, even from them: and, indeed, by treſpaſſing againſt Truth on ſo ſlight an Inducement as a Jeſt, will bring himſelf into a Temptation, as well as a Suſpicion, of making ſtill freer with it, whenever that may ſerve a Purpoſe of greater Moment to him. The Affectation therefore of being witty by ſpreading Falſehoods is by no Means an allowable Vanity. Nor indeed can any Way of raiſing our own Reputation be at all defended, that is inconſiſtent with Veracity.

Some appear to think it very pardonable, provided they ſay no Harm of others, to ſay

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as much Good as they pleaſe of themſelves, true or falſe. For whom, they argue, doth that hurt? Why, if you are not believed, it will hurt you that ſay it, very much. And if you are, it may hurt thoſe who hear it, or hear of it, ſtill more. No one hath a Right to put off himſelf, any more than another, for more than his Value: and he who attempts it knowingly, commits, as far as in him lies, a very baſe, and often very miſchievous, Fraud. Probably indeed the World will detect him: but that proves only his Folly, not his Innocence.

Some again contrive a different, and aſtoniſhing Method of impoſing on Mankind in this Reſpect. They take a Pride in ſaying, not good, but bad Things of themſelves, that are not true: profeſs vile Opinions, which inwardly they do not believe; and pretend to have done profligate Actions, for which they have not had the Heart or the Opportunity. For who can forbid them, they imagine, to treat their own Characters as freely as they pleaſe? And indeed, if it was really their View to become, by theſe Means, Objects of public Scorn and Abhorrence, they have fairly earned it, and one would wiſh them Succeſs. But their ſeeming unaccountable Self-denial is rank Ambition.

They want to gain Credit to Wickedneſs and themſelves at the ſame Time: by repreſenting their own Lives and Principles, as worſe than they are, to make thoſe of their Diſciples worſe than they would be; and to place themſelves at the Head of this choſen Band. An Employment ſo diabolical in its Plan, and ſo execrable in its Effects, that every good and every wiſe Perſon is bound to expreſs the extreme Deteſtation of it, which he cannot but feel.

Theſe, I think, are the chief Caſes, in which one Sort or another of Perſons are apt to reckon Falſehood excuſable. And if it be, on the contrary, ſo bad in the beſt of them, there is no Need of ſhewing particularly, how abominable it muſt be, when deliberately employed in private or party Conteſts, in ſupplanting and undermining, in proſecuting Schemes of unwarrantable Gain, in the Service of Revenge, Malice or Envy, in the Gratification of idle Talkativeneſs, or of a Deſire to ſeem knowing and important. In all theſe Ways, and many more, Liars are doing ſuch dreadful Miſchief, and ſo continually, that were no other Guilt imputable to the *Tongue*, well might St. *James* accuſe it of *ſetting on Fire the Courſe*

Courſe of Nature, and being ſet on Fire of Hell [h].

But in order to apprehend rightly the full Extent of this Sin, it muſt be carefully obſerved, that not only if we affirm any Thing which we think to be falſe, but if we affirm it without Cauſe to think it true, we are ſtill Deceivers: or though we have Cauſe to think it true, yet if we affirm it more poſitively, than we have Cauſe; declaring ourſelves to know certainly what we only believe, or to believe firmly what we only ſuſpect and gueſs, the Caſe is but little mended: that not only groſs Falſities, but more refined ones, artful Quibbles and mental Evaſions, dark Intimations and Hints, not aſſerting, but inſinuating to others, what at leaſt we doubt within ourſelves, all come under the ſame Condemnation: nay, that ſometimes an affected Silence, and at others Truth itſelf, told imperfectly and inſidiouſly, may deeply partake of the Guilt of a Lie. And laſtly, it muſt be remembered, that, beſides the Falſehood of aſſerting what we do not believe, or doing Things equivalent, there is another Sort, often full as bad, of promiſing what we do not intend, or do not afterwards take Care to per-

[h] James iii. 6.

form: and that every leſſer Degree of Expectation given, if it be inſincerely given, or the fulfilling of it neglected, is an Approach to the ſame Sin.

From all theſe Tranſgreſſions then let us conſcientiouſly preſerve ourſelves: and for that End, avoid the ordinary Occaſions of them; compoſe our Reſentments, moderate our Purſuits, mortify our Vanity, check our Fears, think before we ſpeak, and keep Silence rather than ſpeak amiſs: For, *in the Multitude of Words, there wanteth not Sin: but he that refraineth his Lips, is wiſe*[1]. For the ſame End let us frequently reflect, that the Comfort and Agreeableneſs of Converſation, the Continuance of Harmony and Friendſhip amongſt Relations and Acquaintance, amongſt all indeed, who have Concerns with one another, the regular and proſperous Management of Buſineſs, in ſhort, the Tranquillity and good Order of human Society, depends on ſpeaking Truth: For the Harm, that can be done, without departing from it, is comparatively inſignificant. And therefore a Liar, till he is found out, is the moſt miſchievous of Creatures: and, after he is found out, as he never

[1] Prov. x. 19.

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fails to be, ſooner or later, the moſt hated or the moſt deſpiſed.

Let us conſider alſo, that Sincerity is a Duty no leſs plain than important: that our Conſciences require it of us, and reproach us for every Breach of it: that the Light of Nature taught it the very Heathens, though imperfectly, as it did every Thing elſe; and that Scripture abounds with the ſtricteſt Precepts of it, and ſtrongeſt Motives to it. There we learn, that *the Devil is a Liar*, and by Means of lying *was a Murderer, from the Beginning*; involved our whole Race in Sin and Miſery by one Falſehood, and practiſes the ſame Arts upon as many, as he can, to this Day. Thus is he *the Father of Liars:* and, if we are ſuch, *we are of our Father the Devil, and the Luſts of our Father we do* [k]. But the diſtinguiſhed Character of *God* is, that he *cannot lie* [l]: and we ought to be *holy, as he is holy* [m]. The bleſſed Jeſus too is *the faithful and true Witneſs* [n], *who did no Sin, neither was Guile found in his Mouth* [o]; who *for this Cauſe came into the World, that he ſhould bear Witneſs to the Truth* [p],

[k] John viii. 44. [l] Tit. i. 2. [m] 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.
[n] Rev. iii. 14. [o] 1 Pet. ii. 22. [p] John xviii. 37.

and laid down his Life to *redeem us from all Iniquity* [q]. *Therefore* since *Chriſt our Paſſover is ſacrificed for us, let us keep the Feaſt, not with the Leaven of Malice and Wickedneſs, but with the unleavened Bread of Truth and Sincerity* [r]; *and ſpeaking the Truth in Love, grow up into him in all Things, which is the Head, even Chriſt* [s]. Again, *the Spirit of Grace* [t] is *the Spirit of Truth* alſo, whoſe Office is to *guide us into all Truth* [u]. *Faith* and *Truth* are amongſt *his Fruits* [w] in thoſe who are regenerated by him. And *the Wiſdom, which is from above, is without Hypocriſy* [x]. *Lie not* therefore *one to another, ſeeing that ye have put off the old Man with his Deeds; and have put on the new Man, which is renewed in Knowledge, after the Image of him that created him* [y]. Nor doth this appear, in the Word of God, to be more our Duty, than our Intereſt in Reſpect of both Worlds. For in the preſent, *what Man is he, that luſteth to live, and would fain ſee good Days? Keep thy Tongue from Evil; and thy Lips, that they ſpeak no Guile* [z]. And as to the

[q] Tit. ii. 14. [r] 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. [s] Eph. iv. 15.
[t] Heb. x. 29. [u] John xvi. 13. [w] Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.
[x] James iii. 17. [y] Col. iii. 9, 10. [z] Pſ. xxxiv. 12, 13.

next,

next, *If any Man ſeem to be religious, and bridleth not his Tongue, this Man's Religion is vain* [a]. *All Liars ſhall have their Part in the Lake, which burneth with Fire and Brimſtone* [b]. *And there ſhall in no wiſe enter into the new Jeruſalem any Thing that defileth, neither whatſoever worketh Abomination, or maketh a Lie* [c].

[a] James i. 26. [b] Rev. xxi. 8. [c] v. 27.

SERMON IX.

LUKE xxi. 19.

In your Patience poſſeſs ye your Souls.

THE unpleaſant Things which befall us, in one Part or another of this Life, are ſo many; and the Impreſſions, which they make upon us, are commonly ſo ſtrong; that being affected by them no otherwiſe, than we ought, conſtitutes a large and difficult Part of our Duty: which therefore I ſhall endeavour to explain and recommend to you in ſeveral Diſcourſes. And as ſome Things are immediately and neceſſarily uneaſy to us, and ſome only by Means of needleſs and unreaſonable Reflections and Compariſons of our own State with what others are, or with what we might have been: I ſhall ſpeak at preſent of bearing what we cannot but feel diſagreeably, with Compoſure, which is uſually called Pa-

tience; in the next Place, I ſhall direct to the like Behaviour under comparative Misfortunes, which is generally expreſſed by the Name of Contentment; and after theſe moral Obligations, which however need not and cannot well be altogether ſeparated from thoſe of Piety, I ſhall proceed to lay before you more diſtinctly the religious ones, of Reſignation firſt, and then of Thankfulneſs, under every Affliction and ſeeming Diſadvantage.

Now the Feelings unavoidably diſagreeable to us, and tempting us to Impatience, are chiefly Pain, Sorrow, Fear, and Anger.

1. Pain: under which may be comprehended alſo Sickneſs, Reſtleſſneſs, and languid Lowneſs. Theſe are often ſo grievous, by their Degree, or Continuance, or both; that we cannot fail, from the very Make of our Nature, to ſuffer under them extremely: and ſtifling at ſuch Times all Expreſſions of ſuffering, and earneſt Wiſhes of Eaſe, would uſually require too violent an Effort to be laſting; or perhaps to be ſafe, even could we perſiſt in it. Beſides, theſe external Marks of Diſtreſs were certainly deſigned by Providence to excite a proper Degree of Pity and Aſſiſtance from thoſe around us; which, without ſome powerful

ful Calls upon them, would frequently be withheld. And therefore we ought neither to condemn ourſelves, nor others, who may poſſibly undergo far more than we imagine, for ſome ſtrong Expreſſions of preſent Miſery: nor think it a very heinous Fault, if they now and then exceed the proper Bounds. But ſtill the more calm and moderate we are, the more we ſhall appear, if not to need, yet to deſerve, both Compaſſion and Relief; and they will both be afforded us with more Good-will and Regard. Then further, all vehement Complaints and immoderate Significations of our Wretchedneſs, heighten ſtrangely our own Senſe of it; and thus either work us up into wild Rage, or ſink us down into ſpiritleſs Dejection; and ſo make our Caſe much worſe than it was; when, alas, we have Cauſe to ſeek out for every Alleviation, great or ſmall.

In acute Torments, it is a very comfortable Circumſtance, if we can hope, that they will not be durable. Even a ſhort Time, indeed, will ſeem dreadfully long to us. But however, it muſt be a Conſolation in a Storm, that we are making towards a ſafe Harbour within our View, though we ſeem to approach it ſlowly. And as the eaſing of Pain

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is not only Eaſe but Delight; we ſhould ſupport ourſelves by expecting it, as well as enjoy it when it comes.

In tedious Diſorders it may be very uſeful to look back now and then, and ſee how much we have gone through already: not in order to load our Minds with the Burthen of it a ſecond Time; but to learn, from what we have done already, what we can do more, if Need be. And probably, we ſhall be able to do it with leſs Difficulty hereafter, than we did before. For by Degrees and proper Care, both our Minds and Bodies become habituated to endure Hardſhip quietly and chearfully. It is a great Proof and Inſtance of the Mercy of our Creator, that we are ſo framed. And we ought to make a faithful Uſe of his Goodneſs in this Reſpect, as well as others.

But in order to acquieſce more patiently under our Sufferings, we ſhould look beyond the Bitterneſs to the poſſible Benefits of them. Our Liableneſs to them may teach us Caution and Prudence in many Parts of our Conduct, in order to avoid them; may preſerve us from Follies deſtructive to our Fortunes, our Reputations, our Health itſelf. For Numbers have preſumed ſo far upon their Strength, as utterly

utterly to deſtroy it by Irregularities, while the happy Neceſſity of being diſcreet in the Management of themſelves hath carried on many who were very infirm, comfortably enough, to a good old Age. Therefore, on the Whole, perhaps bodily Complaints may prove a Security againſt greater Inconveniences: and, were theſe leſs; yet only the Difference between the one Evil and the others ought to be computed, as clear Loſs to us. Nor is it only from Follies, that Men are thus kept back, but frequently from Sins alſo: from ſome, to which, if they would examine themſelves, they might perceive they ſhould have been expoſed; and poſſibly from others, of which they have no Suſpicion. Firmneſs of Conſtitution, Vehemence of Appetites and Paſſions, flowing Spirits, Confidence of being able to do and to bear almoſt any Thing, miſlead Men unaccountably in the Conduct of Life: make them forgetful of God and their latter End, prompt them to Debauchery, Intemperance, Violence, Injuſtice, to regard only preſent Indulgence, and take the good Things of this World for their Portion. Better were it for ſuch as reſiſt not theſe Temptations, if

they

they had experienced in their Stead the ſevereſt Diſcipline of Pain and Sickneſs. Theſe remind us of our Dependence on him who made us; of the Vanity of earthly Enjoyments, of Mortality and its Conſequences; of pitying and leſſening the Afflictions of our Fellow-creatures; of ſhewing Kindneſs, as we often need it. And the Exerciſe of Devotion towards God, and Goodneſs to thoſe around us, will ſo pleaſingly employ our Thoughts, ſo effectually ſooth our Minds, and reconcile us to ourſelves and our Condition, that we ſhall find the rougheſt Attacks on our outward Frame very ſupportable.

I ſhall only obſerve further under this Head, that Poverty and Want, when they are ſo extreme as to bring on actual bodily Sufferings, are to be placed to the Account of Pain: but ſuch Pain very ſeldom, if ever, ariſes to near the Height which various Diſeaſes cauſe; and is much more conſtantly cured or mitigated by the Care of charitable Perſons. Indigence, therefore, in this View, is very conſiſtent with Patience: and that in the other View, of Reflection and Compariſon, it is equally compatible with Contentment, ſhall be ſhewn you hereafter.

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2. The next Source of Impatience before mentioned is Sorrow: which ſometimes is mere Sympathy with the Calamities of others. But this does not commonly riſe to the Height of Impatience: much oftener we are impatient with the wretched through our Want of Sympathy. There are thoſe however, who are made ſo uneaſy by the Diſtreſſes which they ſee, that they will not bear the Uneaſineſs of attending to them enough to give them due Aſſiſtance. Now this exceſſive Tenderneſs is an unhappy Infirmity. It argues indeed ſomewhat of a right Diſpoſition: but perverted to a quite different Purpoſe from what Nature meant. And we ſhould moderate the paſſive Feeling, in order to exert the requiſite active Goodneſs; nor would this, on Trial, be found very difficult.

But our Grief is uſually for Things happening, which we apprehend to be Evils to ourſelves: and they may be of various Sorts. The more conſiderable are, Unkindneſs or Loſs of Friends, Diminutions of Fortune, Diſappointments in worldly Views, Imputations on our Characters, Conſciouſneſs of imprudent or ſinful Behaviour. All theſe may be needleſsly aggravated by the voluntary Workings of

of our own Minds; and ſo far belong to the Head of Diſcontent: but much of the Concern, which they give, is unavoidable, and relates to the preſent Subject.

Unkindneſs, where we had peculiar Reaſon to expect the contrary, is one of the bittereſt Afflictions of Life. We ſhould labour to prevent it, by chuſing the Objects both of our Love and Eſteem with great Caution; and reſtrain our Affection towards them within due Bounds; inſtead of letting it run, or perhaps forcing it, into romantic Extremes, which muſt end in ſomething wrong; and we ſhould moſt attentively endeavour to give no Cauſe of Diſlike and Alienation. When it happens notwithſtanding, that our moſt reaſonable Hopes are fruſtrated; Change of Opinion concerning the blameable Party muſt naturally, if we are conſiderate, produce in us Change of Regard. And we muſt comfort ourſelves, that the Fault is not on our Side; take Care to continue ſtill equally unreproachable; apply our Thoughts to the Duties of ſuch other Connections and Ties, as remain upon us after this is weakened or diſſolved; raiſe our Hearts more to him, who always makes a gracious Return; and then no Ingratitude or Infidelity,

which

which we can experience on Earth, will be able to overwhelm us.

Concern for the Loſs of our Friends by Death, in itſelf a ſore Trial, is aggravated ſometimes by a confuſed Imagination, as if Death were a Misfortune to them: whereas, if they were good and virtuous, it is in Truth the greateſt poſſible Gain. It can therefore be only ourſelves, that we bemoan with Juſtice: and the Damage to us may be very conſiderable: for which Reaſon we ſhould be ſollicitous, both to make all the Improvement by our Friends, and ſhew all the Kindneſs to them, that we can, whilſt we have them; leſt we ſhould regret our Negligence, when it is too late. But, though the common Fault is under-rating the Value of thoſe, who are near and ought to be dear to us, yet preſent Grief on loſing them may poſſibly overdo it; and we may find ourſelves able to go on without them far more tolerably, than we imagined. Neceſſity will put us on exerting our Powers: we ſhall ſeek for other Helps and other Comforts; and, in ſome Degree at leaſt, we ſhall find them. Or, ſuppoſing the Accident to be as grievous, and as irreparable, as we appre-

hend it; yet this Conſolation is left, that the painful Feeling of it will greatly diminiſh, however impoſſible we may at the Time conceive that to be. Indeed ſome appear unwilling that this ſhould happen; and account it a Duty to afflict themſelves as much and as long as they can: whilſt others go on to do it, though they profeſs to believe it a great Sin. But, in Reality, moderate Concern, for a moderate Seaſon, is the uſeful Dictate of Nature: and immoderate Concern is pardonable Weakneſs; only it ought not to be wilfully indulged, wrought up to a great Height and lengthened. Even if we affect to do theſe Things, God has mercifully provided, in the unchangeable Frame of our Nature, that they ſhall have an End: and we ſhould, inſtead of abſurdly reſiſting him, co-operate with him by prudent Reflection: not aim at Inſenſibility; but only at ſuch a rational Degree of Diſengagement, as ſuits our Condition; thus preparing by due Behaviour under one Stroke, to bear others which are to be expected. Perſons on a Journey quit many Things, one after another, that are very agreeable to them; regret them all, but go forward however with compoſed Minds. Now we are Travellers through Life: our Friends are ſo too:

too: our appointed Stages are different: and we muſt learn to part.

Another Cauſe of Sorrow, Loſs of worldly Subſtance, if it be ſo great as to bring on abſolute painful Want, hath been already conſidered: and if it doth no more than lower us in Compariſon with others, will be conſidered hereafter. But a few Things may be obſerved here. We commonly urge it, as a great Aggravation of our Grief, if we not only are deſtitute of the Conveniences, which wealthier Perſons enjoy, but have had them and known them, and been deprived of them. Now ſurely, on the Whole, our Condition is better for this, than if we had never had them, unleſs we make it worſe by repining. Beſides, when we had them, did they make us extremely happy? In all Likelihood far from it. And why then ſhould foregoing them make us extremely miſerable? Or how happy ſoever we were before, why ſhould we not now be as eaſy as we can? Why indeed ſhould we not provide for ſuch Accidents, by living in the Midſt of Plenty, as if we had leſs of it, and doing Good with the Remainder? This would be the beſt Uſe of it, were we ever ſo ſure of keeping the Whole; but hath a ſingular Advantage, if we

are to loſe Part. For then we ſhall be able afterwards to afford ourſelves, perhaps nearly, if not quite, as much as we did before: the Poor and the Public will be the Sufferers; and our Concern for them will, inſtead of a ſelfiſh, be a virtuous one, and probably ſeldom exceſſive.

Diſappointments in other worldly Matters, Failure of obtaining Rank, Power, Favour, or Loſs of them after they are obtained, require ſcarce any other Conſiderations to alleviate them, than Diſappointments about Wealth do. Only as it is yet more uncertain, whether they, who ſeek them, ſhall be able to acquire them; or they, who acquire them, to retain them; and indeed, whether they, who do both, ſhall be the better or the worſe for them; there is leſs Reaſon to ſet our Hearts upon them, and afflict ourſelves at Croſſes in Relation to them.

But perhaps our Grief is, that our Character in the World is impaired: and this we cannot tell how to bear. Yet the Caſe may be, that it had been raiſed too high; and now is reduced only to what it ſhould be. Surely we may bear this: it will teach us to know ourſelves, keep us from aiming in any Reſpect at Things above us, and do us Good many Ways. Or if others think too lowly of us, yet provided they impute

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Nothing bad to us, we may ſtill be very eaſy. We ourſelves are ignorant of the Worth of many: no Wonder, if many be ignorant of ours. But ſuppoſing, that even downright Ill is ſpoken of us; poſſibly it is becauſe we have deſerved juſt the contrary, becauſe we have done our Duty; and then what ſaith the Scripture? That we have Cauſe to be ſorry and dejected? No. Suffering for Conſcience Sake is the very Caſe, of which our Saviour ſaith in the Text, *In your Patience poſſeſs ye your Souls.* Elſewhere he ſaith more. *Bleſſed are ye, when Men ſhall revile you—and ſay all Manner of Evil falſely againſt you, for my Name's Sake: rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your Reward in Heaven* [a]. Nay, he goes further ſtill: *Woe unto you, when all Men ſhall ſpeak well of you* [b]. Not that a good Reputation is in itſelf a blameable Thing: but that when *all Men*, particularly bad Men, applaud any one highly, it is a Ground for him to ſuſpect himſelf of being too much *conformed to this World* [c]. Or, if we are not defamed for having acted wiſely and well, yet perhaps it is for ſomething indifferent, that we are miſrepreſented; and we cannot be fairly accuſed of acting fooliſhly or wickedly. In

[a] Matth. v. 11, 12. [b] Luke vi. 26. [c] Rom. xii. 2.

this Caſe, if we have not Merit, we have Innocence, to ſupport us. And a great Support it is, had we none elſe. But there will always be ſome in the World to do us Juſtice. And, by the Aſſiſtance of their Friendſhip, indeed ſooner or later without it, Time will bring Truth to Light.

But poſſibly we think our Behaviour hath been imprudent; and we have brought our Sufferings on ourſelves; and this cauſes our Sorrow. Yet poſſibly alſo we may charge ourſelves, as Perſons under Affliction often do, either unjuſtly, or however much too heavily. We did as well perhaps, as the Abilities, which God hath given us, permitted: and if ſo, we are not to blame. But if we were imprudent, let us grow prudent now: not torment ourſelves fruitleſsly, which would be freſh Folly, but labour compoſedly to retrieve our falſe Steps, as far as we can.

But it may be we grieve, not for Indiſcretions merely, but for Sins. And this Grief ſhould certainly be the heavieſt, which is uſually the lighteſt. Yet, though in moſt Perſons it very much wants to be increaſed; in ſome it needs to be reſtrained and regulated. Self-Reflection was given us, not barely to make us uneaſy,

uneaſy, but, by ſo doing, to amend us. If it riſes to a higher Degree, than contributes to our Amendment, it is undergoing ſo much Miſery to no Uſe. And if we carry it ſo far as to obſtruct our Amendment, it is adding greatly to our former Guilt. Exceſs of Concern either for the weak or the wicked Things that we have done, may ſink us into Deſpondency, may drive us to Intemperance, may incite us to yet more deſperate Courſes. Therefore we ſhould by no Means be impatient with ourſelves: (for it is commonly a Mark of Pride: we cannot bear the Imagination of having acted wrong:) but ſhould humbly acknowledge our Faults and Infirmities, beg Wiſdom and Strength from God's Holy Spirit for the Sake of his bleſſed Son; and in the Faith of that Aſſiſtance, without which we can do Nothing, meekly and perſeveringly labour to do better. By this Method we ſhall learn Self-Knowledge and Watchfulneſs; inprove by our very Falls in Skill to ſtand, recover our Character amongſt Men, acquire a lively Hope of Acceptance with God, and be at Peace within.

3. The next Cauſe of Impatience, mentioned before, was Fear. Now Fear ſuppoſes the Evil apprehended to be at ſome Diſtance: per-

haps the Diſtance is ſo great, that we need not yet provide againſt it: and why ſhould we diſquiet ourſelves before the Time? But admitting the Danger to be nearer: though doubtleſs this Paſſion was wiſely and kindly implanted in us by our Maker for Precaution, yet we muſt keep it within Bounds; elſe we ſhall be incapable of uſing effectual Precaution; indeed ſhall contribute to bring on the very Thing we dread. If we preſerve our Minds in a Condition to take proper Meaſures, it may never come near us; or though it do, may never fall upon us. Future bad Events, as well as good, are extremely uncertain. Our Pleaſure is often diminiſhed by the latter Uncertainty. Why ſhould not our Uneaſineſs be calmed by the former? Have not we often ſeen others, have not we often been ourſelves, grievouſly frightened with the Proſpect of what after all did not happen? Let us oppoſe Terror with Hope. Or, if the Agitation, produced by the Conflict between the two, makes our Caſe worſe, as in ſome Minds it ſeems to do; let us lay aſide Hope, and take it for granted that the Misfortune we expect will befall us: yet it may continue a much leſs Time, than we expect. Or if not, it may however be much

more

more tolerable. Fear is a ſtrange Magnifier. People ſay, they are poſitive, they are certain, that they ſhall never be able to go through what is approaching. They are not certain, they cannot be certain before-hand. Human Nature will endure much more, than we imagine. At leaſt, ſurely God can ſtrengthen us, if he will. And his Word declares, *God is faithful, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the Temptation alſo, make a Way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it* [d]. Moſt Men have found, and the timorous will own it, that they have frequently ſuffered a great deal more by the Apprehenſion of heavy Strokes, than by the Infliction. Why ſhould we not learn then to moderate our Apprehenſions? Look ſteadily at the Thing feared: examine the worſt of it: but obſerve alſo the Mitigations and Remedies, and apply them. They are various in themſelves, and uſeful in various Degrees, according to the Difference of Circumſtances: and the Particulars cannot be reckoned up here. Only, do nothing wicked by Way of Prevention; for Sin is worſe than any temporal Suffering. Set not your Thoughts wholly on guarding againſt

[d] 1 Cor. x. 13.

one

one Danger; for there are many: nor againſt them all; for your Attention ought to be divided amongſt the ſeveral Duties of Life, that none may be neglected. Want not to be ſecurer, than the State, in which we live, will allow: but let it ſuffice you, that the World is governed by the Providence of God. Pray to him, and cheerfully put your Intereſts into his Hands, and all will end well. *Be not afraid of ſudden Fear—when it cometh: for the Lord ſhall be thy Confidence, and ſhall keep thy Foot from being taken* [e]. *The Fear of the wicked ſhall come upon him: but the Deſire of the righteous ſhall be granted* [f]. *The Fear of Man bringeth a Snare; but whoſo putteth his Truſt in the Lord ſhall be ſafe* [g].

Theſe Aſſurances hold good more eſpecially with Reſpect to one Fear, that of Death, which deſerves to be mentioned ſeparately. We ſhould always live in the Thought of it: but many live in the Dread alſo; and dread it on caſions where there is not even the ſmalleſt Hazard of it. And ſometimes their very Alarms, ſometimes the uſeleſs and hurtful Precautions, which they take in Conſequence of them, haſten it. Theſe Things are evident-

[e] Prov. iii. 25, 26. [f] Prov. x. 24. [g] Prov. xxix. 25.

ly

ly in a high Degree unwiſe: and a moderate Uſe of Reaſon, one ſhould think, might check them. But be we ever ſo prudent, it will come. And Numbers are terrified with the great Pain, which they fancy it muſt bring with it. But this, as far as ever we have room to judge from Appearances, is quite a groundleſs Imagination: and there are very few who have not undergone, perhaps many Times over, more bodily Sufferings already, than they will in the Hour of their Diſſolution. Still, were Death to end our Being, the View of it to good Perſons would be a melancholy one indeed. But, God be thanked, *our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt hath aboliſhed Death, and brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Goſpel*[h]. Impenitent Sinners, I own, inſtead of Comfort, have only Cauſe from hence for unſpeakably worſe Terror. And ſtrong Warnings of it are kindly given them in holy Writ. *Be not afraid of them, that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you ſhall fear: Fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath Power to caſt into Hell: yea, I ſay unto you, Fear him*[i]. Nor is there, in the whole Creation, any Cure

[h] 2 Tim. i. 10. [i] Luke xii. 4, 5.

for

for this Fear, but Repentance and Faith, and Chriſtian Obedience to God's Laws: and theſe are a perfect Cure. For our bleſſed Redeemer hath condeſcended to die, that they who believe in him and keep his Commandments may live in Happineſs for ever: or, to expreſs it in the Words of Scripture, *that, through Death, he might deſtroy him, that had the Power of Death, that is, the Devil; and deliver them, who, through Fear of Death, were all their Life-time ſubject to Bondage*[k].

4. The laſt Trial of our Patience, of which I propoſed to ſpeak, is Anger. With ourſelves we are ſeldom angry enough, when we do amiſs: and yet we may be too angry at our own Faults, as well as too much grieved for them. Of this latter Exceſs I treated under the ſecond Head: and the Obſervations and Directions, there laid down, may without Difficulty be applied here. I ſhall now, therefore, diſcourſe only of Anger againſt others: and that more briefly, becauſe I have lately treated that Subject at large. Take Notice then of the following Motives for moderating this Paſſion. Impatience of Pain, Exceſs of Sorrow and Fear, hurt only or chiefly ourſelves,

[k] Heb. ii. 14, 15.

with

with whom we have the beſt Right to make free; and ſeldom provoke any one elſe to do us Harm: but Exceſs of Anger injures others, which is a great Sin; and excites them to Revenge, which is a great Folly in us. We have ſurely Failings and Sufferings enough beſides; and need not add to them thus. But indeed, without looking ſo far, Anger in its very Nature is tormenting: and, when immoderate or frequent, ſours our Tempers, imbitters our Lives, wears out our Frame, lowers our Character, leſſens our Influence, thwarts our Intereſts, multiplies our Difficulties, hurries us into Dangers, even of our Lives, in more Ways than one. Plainly therefore we are concerned, on many Accounts, to reſtrain it within the Limits of Reaſon and Religion, by every Method in our Power: by ſerious Conſiderations of Duty to him, who requires it of us, and of Gratitude to him, who is ſo patient and long-ſuffering towards us; by cultivating Good-will to our Fellow-creatures, by reflecting on the Frailty of human Nature, on our own innumerable Frailties and Errors, in Behaviour to others; which we doubtleſs muſt wiſh to have gently paſſed

over

over by them; and therefore ought to be gentle ourſelves. We ſhould endeavour by prudent and mild Treatment of thoſe with whom we are concerned, by diſcreet Vigilance over them, by friendly Inſtructions and Admonitions given them, to prevent their acting wrongly by us: and, if they do, notwithſtanding, we ſhould conſider calmly, and without Exaggeration, the Degree of the Fault committed, hear and weigh their Defences and Excuſes, make Uſe of cool Expoſtulations to convince and reform them; and employ others in this good Work, who may be more likely to do it well and ſucceſsfully, if we have any Cauſe to diſtruſt our own Temper or Weight. And amongſt other Things we ſhould frequently recollect, how happy and pleaſed with ourſelves we have been afterwards, when we have reſiſted and overcome Incitements to unreaſonable Rage, and how miſerable and full of fruitleſs Remorſes, when we have yielded to them.

But beſides the Directions more peculiarly appropriated to each of the four Temptations to be impatient, which I have mentioned, there are ſome ſcarcely touched upon yet, which in a good

good Meaſure belong to them all. One is, to think often how poſſible it is, that more or fewer of theſe Temptations may ſooner or later come to our Share. Were we indeed to imagine it more probable than it is, that many of them would, this might ſink our Spirits, and weaken our Strength; our *Hearts failing us for Fear, and for looking after thoſe Things, which* perhaps, *are* not *coming*[l]. But previouſly conſidering in a reaſonable Manner, to what Sort of Accidents we are liable, will guard us againſt the vain Imagination of being exempt from Evil, prevent us from being alarmed, ſurpriſed, and caſt down by it, *as though ſome ſtrange Thing happened unto us*[m], and gradually reconcile us to the Lot of Humanity: we ſhall be ready and prepared for whatever may fall out; recollect immediately, that no Trial hath overtaken us, *but ſuch as is common to Men*[n]; and *reſiſt* all Emotions of immoderate Vehemence, *knowing that the ſame Afflictions are accompliſhed in our Brethren that are in the World*[o]. Another Direction is, that under a long Continuance of Pain, or Grief, or Fear, or Provocations to Anger, if we find that by

[l] Luke xxi. 26. [m] 1 Pet. iv. 12. [n] 1 Cor. x. 13. [o] 1 Pet. v. 9.

the

the mere Uſe of Arguments from Prudence, Virtue, or Religion, we cannot get the better of them, but are in Danger of being overcome; we ſhould try the Effect of turning our Attention from them for the preſent, as well as we are able, to other Subjects: undoubtedly to the beſt and moſt valuable that we can; but to any, that are innocent, rather than grow fretful, or deſpond. Only we muſt never take Refuge in Trifles out of Choice; but conſider it as a Mark of Weakneſs, and Cauſe of Shame, that we are driven to them: and we muſt beware, that they never baniſh pious and ſerious Thoughts out of our Minds, or depreciate them in our Eſteem.

Every one of theſe Rules, I truſt, may aſſiſt us, more or leſs, to *run with Patience the Race that is ſet before us*[p], as the Apoſtle exhorts. But the great Aſſiſtance will be what in the next Words he directs, *Looking unto Jeſus, the Author and Finiſher of our Faith, who, for the Joy that was ſet before him, endured the Croſs—and is ſet down at the right Hand of the Throne of God*[q]. His firſt Diſciples were enabled to bear Pain,

[p] Heb. xii. 1. [q] Ver. 2.

Sorrow,

Sorrow, Fear, Provocation, each of them in the higheſt Degree, from their cruel Perſecutors, by *conſidering him, that endured ſuch Contradiction of Sinners, leſt they ſhould be wearied and faint in their Minds*[r]. Well then may we, who have ſo much leſs to undergo, *poſſeſs our Souls in Patience* amidſt it all. Indeed without Patience we cannot, in the loweſt Senſe, *poſſeſs our Souls*; be Maſters of ourſelves, and enjoy even the preſent Being, which God hath given us; the beſt Things will be taſteleſs, moſt Things bitter; we ſhall torment ourſelves, and repine againſt him. But if we watch over our Hearts, and apply to God, He will *ſtrengthen us with all Might, according to his glorious Power, unto all Patience and long Suffering with Joyfulneſs*[s]: *Tribulation will work Patience; and Patience, Experience; and Experience, Hope; and Hope will not make us aſhamed*[t]. For not only ſhall we poſſeſs our Souls in Comfort here, but if, as St. *James* enjoins, we *let Patience have her perfect Work*[u], we ſhall ſecure the Poſſeſſion of endleſs Felicity hereafter. For God will give *to them, who by patient Continuance in*

[r] Ver. 3. [s] Col. i. 11. [t] Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. [u] Jam. i. 4.

well-doing seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, eternal Life [w]. Therefore, *having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth Fruit with Patience* [x]: *and the Lord direct your Hearts into the Love of God and the patient waiting for Christ* [y]. *For ye have Need of Patience, that after ye have done the Will of God, ye may receive the Promise* [z].

[w] Rom. ii. 7. [x] Luke viii. 15. [y] 2 Theſſ. iii. 5. [z] Heb. x. 36.

SERMON

SERMON X.

PHIL. iv. 11.

—I have learned, in whatſoever State I am, therewith to be content.

YOU have lately been exhorted to the Duty of Patience: which conſiſts in bearing well ſuch Things, as immediately and neceſſarily give Uneaſineſs: and now I proceed to that of Contentment under ſuch, as diſturb us only on Reflection and Compariſon. One ſhould think, that they who need not ſuffer any Thing, would not; yet very often ſuch, as feel no poſitive Evil, that is worth naming, are very far from being at Eaſe. Multitudes are diſſatisfied, and ſome extremely miſerable, with very little other Cauſe for it, than the unreaſonable Workings of their own Minds. Inſtead of contriving to be as happy as they can in their Condition, which is plainly the

wiſe Part, they ſet themſelves to find out, why they ſhould be wretched in it, and accordingly become ſo. Were they only to deſire with Moderation any proper good Thing, which they have not, or endeavour with Moderation to obtain it, this would be always void of Blame, often worthy of Praiſe: they would be pleaſed, perhaps improved alſo, if they ſucceeded; and compoſed, though they failed. But vain Man extends his Wiſhes and his Claims far beyond theſe Bounds: and will enjoy no Peace within, becauſe he is not, in this or that Reſpect, what he might have been, or what others are.

But ſuppoſe he were all that he wiſhes, how doth he know, that he ſhould not quickly wiſh for more, with the ſame tormenting Eagerneſs, or that his Wiſhes would ever end? For there would be juſt the ſame Ground for new ones. His Complaint at preſent is, not that he poſitively ſuffers any Thing, but that he wants ſomething. Now ſomething is, and muſt be always, wanting to finite Beings, be they raiſed ever ſo high: elſe they would be infinite. The fallen Angels were unſpeakably above human Rank; yet they felt a Deficiency, and abſurdly repined at it: Heaven

was

was not good enough for them, and ſo they were caſt down to Hell. Men imagine, that were they but in ſuch or ſuch a State, they ſhould never be tempted to think of any Thing more. But this is only a Sign, that they do not know themſelves. In Proportion as their Situation was raiſed, their Proſpect would be enlarged: and they would long to be Maſters of all within their View. Succeſs would encourage them to hope for greater Succeſs yet: and beſides, they would be diſappointed in the Felicity they promiſed themſelves from what they have got; but inſtead of learning from thence, in what real Felicity lies, would go on to ſeek for it in ſomething elſe; and be at leaſt as remote from it, as they were before. We ſee this perpetually, or with the ſmalleſt Attention may ſee it, in the Caſe of others: and it is aſtoniſhing Partiality, that we cannot believe it would be our own. Nay, perhaps we ſee it is our own Caſe, as far as we have advanced hitherto: and yet are weak enough to imagine it would be quite otherwiſe, could we but advance a few Steps more: whereas in Truth, he that is uneaſy merely becauſe he hath not all he would, never will be eaſy till he grows wiſer.

Happily we none of us diſquiet ourſelves about every Thing that we have not. If we did, how blameable and how pitiable ſhould we be! We all know Numbers of Things, that we ſhould be very glad of, and yet can bear the Want of them very well: and why not the Want of others as well? What is impoſſible, it would be Madneſs to covet. What we cannot obtain, is the ſame in Relation to us, as if it were impoſſible in itſelf. Therefore we ſhould never think of it. And what is very unlikely to be got, ſhould ſcarcely be more minded, than if we knew that abſolutely we could not get it. But you will ſay, how ſhall we put theſe Things out of our Minds? Turn them to ſomething elſe. Recollect the Comforts that you have, and rejoice in them. All of us have many ſuch. Reaſonably good Health, wholſome Food and refreſhing Sleep, a Proviſion of the other Neceſſaries of Life, a Share of its Conveniences, Acquaintance that are agreeable to us, Friends that wiſh us well, and, upon Occaſion, would ſhew it, Opportunities of eaſy and chearful Converſation, the good Opinion and Eſteem of thoſe about us, the very Sight of the Sun and the View of the Face of Nature,

ture, are Things, every one of them deſigned and fitted to give us Pleaſure, if we would but be ſo kind to ourſelves as to take it. Conſciouſneſs, that through the Grace of God's holy Spirit we mean, and on the Whole behave well, Perſuaſion that, through the Merits of his bleſſed Son, we are intereſted in his Favour, Hopes that his fatherly Providence will watch over us here, and his Goodneſs make us perfectly happy hereafter, theſe are Bleſſings of a higher Order, which we all may have; and as no one ought to be, or with Reaſon can be, content without them, ſo every one ſurely may well be content with them; and think himſelf enough diſtinguiſhed by ſuch Mercies, let him have ever ſo few Advantages beſides. And we ſhould accuſtom ourſelves to look, more than we do, on the bright Side of our Condition; not in order to grow vain and contemptuous upon it, which is the common Uſe that is made of contemplating it, but to enjoy it with humble Complacency. We ſhould place a juſt Value on all our greater Comforts: and fetch out of the very leaſt as much as they will afford us. Applying our Minds to become eaſy and ſatisfied is evidently right: but why ſhould

we reaſon ourſelves into being miſerable, and reſolve not to be the better for any Thing, becauſe we have not this or that?

Perhaps indeed you will allow, that grieving merely becauſe you are not poſſeſſed of Things, that are plainly above you, is very blameable; and will alledge, that you are not guilty of it; that you are willing to be inferior both to what you might have been, and to what many others are. But ſtill you will plead, that ſuch and ſuch have no Title to Pre-eminence over you, or even Equality with you: yet they have obtained it, and that you cannot bear. Now conſider; theſe very Perſons, who give you Diſſatisfaction and Envy, if you knew all, you might ſee Cauſe to pity. You know not how little Delight they may have in all their ſeeming Advantages; or what Sufferings they may on one Account or another undergo; nay, how dearly they may pay for what you imagine to be a principal Part of their Felicity. For uſually there are great Deductions to be made from all Appearances of Proſperity amongſt Men; and often they, whoſe outward Shew is moſt admired, are the moſt wretched within. Indeed, though doubtleſs there are many, with whom you would

wiſh

wiſh to change ſome Things, there are few, if any, with whom you would conſent to an intire Change; and take their Perſon, their Age, their Health, their Temper, their Situation, their Employment, their Connections, their Vexations, their Hazards, their Circumſtances of all Kinds, for yours. And if you ſcarce know, with whoſe Condition, upon the Whole, you would be better pleaſed; why are you not pleaſed with your own? For ſurely, it would be too unreaſonable to deſire, that you ſhould pick and chuſe from each only what you like, and unite it all in yourſelf.

But further, your Condition is juſt what it is, let that of others be what it will: ſuppoſing they enjoy more, or ſuffer leſs, than you; ſtill your Enjoyments and Sufferings are juſt the ſame, as if this were quite the Reverſe. And why do you ſet yourſelf to think the contrary, and diſquiet yourſelf with a falſe Imagination? There will, and there muſt be Inequalities in the World. Nothing can prevent it, but continual Miracles: and if it were prevented and we were all on a Level, we ſhould probably, on the Whole, have great Cauſe to be ſorry. Think then: why is it

harder, that you ſhould be inferior to others, than that they ſhould be inferior to you? Would your State be ever the better, if theirs were made worſe? Would you wiſh theirs to be worſe, that you might have Comfort in the Compariſon? If you would, yours is already much better than you deſerve. Impatience and exceſſive Agitation, under great Pain, Sorrow, Fear, Provocation, is at ſome Times, and in ſome Degree, hardly poſſible to be avoided, and therefore excuſable. But the Diſcontent of thoſe, who have no ſuch Evils to complain of, is of their own Choice: they might be eaſy if they would. And reſolving not to be ſo, becauſe they imagine others are more ſo than they, is not only Unreaſonableneſs, but Ill-will and Malice. The Torment, which they feel, is a guilty one: it puniſhes them juſtly here; and they will be liable, for indulging ſo unchriſtian, ſo inhuman, a Temper, inſtead of *rejoicing with them that rejoice*[a], to far ſeverer Puniſhments hereafter.

But you will ſay perhaps, that your Inferiority in this or that Particular makes you deſpiſed: and who can bear Contempt? But indeed ſcarce any one is deſpiſed for being

[a] Rom. xii. 15.

what

what he is, and cannot help being, but only for affecting to be what he ſhould not or cannot be. The loweſt in all Reſpects may be uſeful; and if they behave properly, will be valued according to their Uſefulneſs. At leaſt they can never deſerve Contempt: and the Conſciouſneſs that they do not, will enable them to ſlight and overlook the little they may meet with: and indeed often to deſpiſe thoſe who deſpiſe them. For worldly Advantages only ſerve to leſſen the Eſteem of ſuch as uſe them ill: and ſome of the greateſt, and, in their own and the vulgar Opinion, the moſt accompliſhed, are often the fartheſt of all People from being truly reſpectable.

But probably you will plead further, that the Perſons, who excite your Diſſatisfaction, are vicious, or at leaſt unworthy of their Preeminences: and they will do Harm with them, or however little or no Good. Now in all Likelihood you think them worſe, or leſs worthy than they are: they may have good Qualities with their Faults, though you are unwilling to ſee them; and you certainly have Faults with your good Qualities, though you are deſirous to overlook them: and how much

better

better you are upon the Whole than they, it may perhaps be neither eaſy nor ſafe for you to judge. But be they ever ſo bad, Providence may over-rule them, and keep them from executing their bad Purpoſes, or may uſe them for its Inſtruments, to correct the Faults of others that are as bad, or exerciſe the Virtues of others, who are much better; poſſibly to correct and exerciſe you. Therefore do not fail under the Trial. But is this Fear of their doing Harm the real Motive of your Diſcontent, or only an Excuſe for it to others and yourſelf?

You will probably reply, that however that be, had you had ſuch and ſuch Advantages, which you have not, you would have done a great deal of Good. But perhaps others will do it in your Stead: and you may if you will, and you certainly ſhould, take Pleaſure in it, by whomſoever done, and not repine at it. But it may be you would not have been able to do the Good you fancy, and would only have brought Diſquiet on yourſelf by attempting it. Nay, it may be, you would not have attempted it: for Difference of Circumſtances makes a great Difference in the Ways of thinking of the ſame Perſons; and we often do

not

not prove to be what we fully imagined we ſhould.

Still, at leaſt, you will ſay, what you wiſh for would make you very happy: and therefore you regret the Want of it. But regret it as little as poſſible, and be as happy as you can without it. Perhaps you would be ſcarcely, perhaps not at all, happier than you are. Multitudes find this to be true every Day: they obtain what they deſire; and very ſoon after, if not inſtantly, perceive that their Condition is never the better for it. But they are thought happy, you will ſay, and admired or envied: and that alone is a deſirable Thing. Now ſurely it is very poor Comfort, indeed it is rather an Aggravation of Sorrow, when we feel our Condition wretched or inſipid, to have it thought joyful and deſirable: to be congratulated on our Situation, when we know it is a Subject of Condoleance; and ſo to have Pity from none, but the ill Will of many, to load us with more Uneaſineſs, when we inwardly groan under too much already. The wiſe King ſaith, *Wrath is cruel, and Anger is outrageous; but who can ſtand before Envy*[b]? Our Deſire of producing it in others is im-

[b] Prov. xxvii. 4.

moral;

moral; for it is a Deſire of giving them Pain: and the Imprudence fully equals the Guilt. For all Pre-eminences, eſpecially when accompanied with Oſtentation of them, or too viſible Complacence in them, to which all who have them are extremely ſubject, ſtir up Malignity in the Obſervers of them: who often find Means to make thoſe very miſerable, whom they would have let alone, and ſuffered to go on quietly, if they had not been provoked by thinking them over-happy.

But ſuppoſing the Advantages, which you pine for, whatever they be, would raiſe no Malice againſt you, but only Admiration of you: how often hath that, nay even the Shadow of it, mere Flattery, made Perſons vain and indiſcreet, miſled them into great Errors, and plunged them into grievous Miſery!

Indeed, without either, all Sorts of Superiority carry their Dangers along with them. If you were placed in a higher Station, perhaps you would be at a Loſs how to behave in it; for there are many Difficulties in all ſuch; you would be found by others, you would find yourſelf, in one Reſpect or another, unequal to it: or if not, it might tempt you to Pride and Abuſe of Power. If you were

poſſeſſed

poſſeſſed of great Wealth, it might lead you, for it hath led many, either to endleſs Deſires of ſtill more; or to Expenſiveneſs and thoughtleſs Extravagance, that would end in Diſtreſs; or to Senſuality and vicious Indulgences, or to contemptible Indolence and Uſeleſſneſs. Accompliſhments of Perſon expoſe the Poſſeſſors of them to immoderate Self-eſteem, to Neglect of uſeful Attainments, to Diſſipation of their Time, often in the unfitteſt Company, to improper Freedoms, to great Hazards of their Reputation and their Innocence. Health and Strength encourage Men to venture upon Irregularities, that prove ruinous to both, and to their Fortunes at the ſame Time; whilſt they, whom Infirmity obliges to be careful, prolong their Days in Comfort. Strength of Genius, and Extent of Knowledge, often bewilder Perſons in fruitleſs Reſearches, or prompt them to dangerous and hurtful Singularities of Opinion: Quickneſs of Parts, and Agreeableneſs in Converſation, frequently betray them into grievous Imprudences of various Kinds, contrary to their own Intereſt, to the Peace of thoſe around them, to Piety, Morals, and common Decency.

But

But whatever may happen to others, you think you ſhould enjoy all the Benefits of theſe Pre-eminences, and avoid all the Evils incident to them. But why do you think ſo? You are juſt of the ſame Make with the reſt of Mankind, and liable to all their Frailties. Your Confidence in yourſelf is a Mark, not of Ability, but of Weakneſs and Ignorance in a Point of the greateſt Conſequence. If you were but humbler, you would be much ſafer: and one material Source of Safety would be Content. For Diſcontent brings People into Miſchiefs innumerable. It is a painful State in itſelf: preys upon the Spirits, deadens the Senſe of every Enjoyment in Life, ſours the Temper, and produces great Wickedneſs, as well as Miſery.

Diſpleaſure with their own Condition tempts many to aim at bettering it unlawfully, by Force or Fraud: and dreadful muſt the Uneaſineſs be, which can drive them to a Method of Relief, ſo evidently criminal. For however ſome may pretend they cannot ſee what Right others have to enjoy ſo much more of the World than themſelves; yet let but any one, who hath leſs Enjoyment of it, apply this Reaſoning to them, and act upon it, then

they

they can perceive exceeding plainly, that his Diſlike of his own Circumſtances in any Reſpect, is no Manner of Reaſon, or Excuſe, for his uſing other than honeſt Means to mend them. For why ſhould their Property, their Character, their Quiet, ſuffer, becauſe he is uneaſy? And yet, what dreadful Havock is there often made of all theſe from no better a Motive! The Kings and Princes of the Earth ravage Nations, murder and diſtreſs Millions; the powerful and wealthy, of lower Degree, oppreſs and injure their Fellow-creatures in more Ways, than can be reckoned up, merely to obtain Advantages, perhaps to which they have no Title, certainly which they of all Men leaſt need, ſolely becauſe they cannot reſt without them; though at the ſame Time they have no Satisfaction, worth naming, from them. And in lower Life, what Numbers are there, who diſturb their Neighbours, to a great Extent ſometimes, and put Things in a Ferment all around them, only to carry ſome Point, which poſſibly they ought not to carry, or which is of little Uſe to them; nay, it may be, only to grieve ſome innocent Object of their Reſentment, or to find any Employ-

ment, rather than none, which may divert for a Time, the inward Chagrin, that devours them! So baneful are the Fruits of Diſcontent.

But when it is not carried ſo far, it is often very blameable: as when it incites Men to importune and teize others for Favours, to which they have no ſufficient Pretenſions; which is giving them Trouble, ſometimes a great deal, without any Right to do it. And then the next Step uſually is, complaining, and being angry, and wanting to be revenged on ſuch, as have not done every Thing for us that we wanted; though poſſibly they have done more than we care to own; or they know or find they cannot do what we wiſh, or are no Way obliged to it, or have Obligations to the contrary; as they eaſily may, of more Kinds than one.

But even ſuppoſing we ſtrive to keep our Diſcontent to ourſelves, yet if it riſe within us to Envy againſt others, this is a great Sin. Barely indeed feeling our own Diſadvantages or Diſappointments, the more ſtrongly on the View of another Perſon's Pre-eminence or Succeſs, is hardly avoidable, and may be nearly

or

or quite innocent. Wiſhing our own Condition were as good, as we take his to be, is not wiſhing ill to him, but only well to ourſelves. But if we grieve, not that we do not enjoy what we would, but that he doth; or ſecretly rejoice in the Sight, or the Thought of any Misfortune, that may bring him down lower and nearer to us: not only we ſhall be tempted to do ill, if we can, to one whom we wiſh ill to; but the Wiſh itſelf is Malice, unprovoked by any Injury, (for his Superiority to us is no Injury;) the directly contrary Diſpoſition to that Love and good Will, which is, under all Provocations, the great Precept of Humanity and of the Goſpel.

Nay further, though we feel no Malevolence at all againſt any one elſe, yet if the comparative Diſadvantages of our Condition fill us with Emotion and inward Agitation, we are ſtill in a wrong State of Mind. It may ſeem perhaps, that our Deſire of any Thing, apprehended to be good, muſt be ſtrong, in Proportion as we apprehend it to be a great Good. But in Reality, we have no Deſire at all for Things that are quite above us; partly, to be ſure, becauſe we have no diſtinct Notions of them;

but partly alſo, becauſe we look on them as not belonging to us. Now would we but conſider whatever we certainly cannot have, in the ſame Light, and whatever we probably cannot have, in nearly the ſame, it would ſave us great Uneaſineſs and Guilt. The Condition of many, who are much diſcontented about it, is in Truth almoſt as good as this World admits; for it doth not admit any high Happineſs: and what can they get then by diſquieting themſelves that it is not better? Moderate Deſires will excite reaſonable Endeavours to mend it, if there appears Room: and immoderate ones will only add Vexation. Sometimes the Vehemence of our Purſuit is the very Cauſe that we miſs our Aim. And were it always the likelieſt Way to Succeſs, yet when Diſappointments happen, as they will frequently happen, it muſt aggravate the Sorrow of them very greatly. Nay, mere Delays may give eager Spirits much more Pain before they attain their Ends, than the Attainment will ever give them Pleaſure afterwards. For every one experiences what yet no one will believe, againſt the next Time, that the largeſt Increaſe of worldly Advantages is commonly little or no Increaſe,

Increaſe, but often a Diminution, of Self-Enjoyment: though indeed were this otherwiſe, bringing down our Wiſhes to Reaſon is ſo much the ſurer and more practicable Method of being eaſy, than bringing every Thing to yield to our Wiſhes, that it ſcarce needs the further Recommendation of being the more virtuous Method alſo.

Still, paying ſome Attention to our worldly Intereſts, is a requiſite Part of Wiſdom: and it may be very blameable, not to ſtretch out our Hand and take what Providence offers. But to covet with Earneſtneſs, and purſue with Impetuoſity, an Object that ſeems to fly from us, when God alone knows what it may prove, if we ſhould overtake it, is generally, if not univerſally, preſumptuous and raſh. Yet this is the Courſe that we commonly take. Whatever we ſee others follow, we follow too, juſt as faſt, without aſking ourſelves why; encourage our wild Fancies, inſtead of checking them; fill our Hearts with imaginary Wants, and become as eager for Multitudes of Things one after another, all which we might do very well without, as if the whole Felicity of our Being conſiſted in them. If Men allow them-

ſelves in ſuch Behaviour, all that Succeſs can do for them, is to engage them ſtill deeper in the ſame Folly. For theſe Cravings have no End, and therefore ſhould be curbed and quieted in the Beginning.

But though Men are not vehemently agitated by Diſcontent, yet if they are dejected and ſunk by it, mourn over the Diſadvantages of their Condition, and live in a State of Affliction, be it ever ſo calm Affliction, on Account of them, even this is by no means right. It may indeed ſometimes be in a great Meaſure, mere bodily Diſeaſe: or it may, when the Degree of it is low, be the Fault of one, who is, on the Whole, virtuous and good. But ſtill it ſhews an undue Attachment to this World, yet unfits Perſons at the ſame Time both for the Comforts to be enjoyed, and the Duties to be done in it. If indulged to any conſiderable Length, it may diſorder not only the Temper, but the Underſtanding. And to ſtrange Lengths it ſometimes runs in People, of whom one muſt think, that if they have Cauſe to lament, it is hard to ſay, who hath Cauſe to be ſatisfied.

Or ſuppoſe the various Diſadvantages of Men

to

to be as great as they think them; yet Happineſs doth not ariſe from outward Circumſtances, or the Accompliſhments uſually admired: elſe how unſpeakably happy would the rich and great, the learned and ingenious, the beautiful and gay be, who all, at Times, confeſs themſelves to be far from it; and how miſerable the reſt of Mankind, who, God be thanked, reliſh their Being very comfortably! Every State hath not only its Inconveniences, but its Conſolations: and the diſcontented would ſee this, if they did not perverſely look ſolely at the former in their own Caſe, and the latter in that of others: magnify what they themſelves want, and under-rate what they have; over-value what their Neighbours enjoy, and forget to make Allowance for what perhaps they ſuffer. We know the worſt of the Condition we are in: but what Evils belong to that which we wiſh to be in, we know not. Beſides, every one cannot have every Thing, that he deſires: and where is the greater Hardſhip, that we ſhould fail of it, than that others ſhould? Many appear or ſucceed better, it may be: but many alſo not near ſo well. Would they have Cauſe to be

wretched, were they in our Circumſtances? If not, why have we?

But further yet: perhaps our Diſadvantages proceed from ourſelves: poſſibly it is our Virtue and our Honour that keeps us back from what we long for: and ſurely, the Poſſeſſion of good Qualities ought to give us more Pleaſure, than any Diſappointments owing to them ſhould give us Pain. Or poſſibly ſome Fault of ours produces what we complain of: our Negligence or Expenſiveneſs brings us into Straits, our Imprudences create us Difficulties, our ill Temper makes Things uneaſy round us, our Irregularities impair our Health and Spirits: correct theſe Errors, inſtead of repining at their Conſequences, and all will be well.

It may be you will ſay indeed, that you have endeavoured to correct your Faults, but without Succeſs; and your chief Diſcontent is at yourſelves. Now if this be really your Caſe, it is a very uncommon one. Many are diſſatisfied with other Perſons and Things, ſome with almoſt all about them; but few with their own Temper and Conduct. Such as really take Pains to amend it, deſerve great Eſteem; and,

and, when they find the Work peculiarly difficult, as they often may, eſpecially after long Indulgence, great Pity likewiſe. But though they ſhould never be ſo far contented with themſelves, as to ceaſe from the Attempt of Reformation, yet, while they are ſure they attempt it in Earneſt, they ſhould acquieſce very calmly, notwithſtanding that their Progreſs is but ſlow. The Nature of all Men is both imperfect and corrupt: and that of ſome much more than of others. The Diſparity of the Faculties of our Minds and the Diſpoſitions of our Hearts is as great, as of our bodily Qualifications or external Circumſtances: and every one muſt ſubmit to his Lot in the former, as well as the latter; for grieving and murmuring will make Nothing better in either. Thoſe Creatures, which cannot at all improve themſelves, appear to be content with being what they are: but we can improve ourſelves greatly; and if we labour to do it chiefly in what beſt deſerves our Labour, Goodneſs and Virtue, we ſhall *out of Weakneſs be made ſtrong* [c], provided we truſt not preſumptuouſly to our own Efforts, but humbly join with them, Faith in

[c] Heb. xi. 34.

God,

God, and Prayer for the Aid of his Holy Spirit, through the Mediation of Jeſus Chriſt: for *his Grace ſhall be ſufficient for us, and his Strength made perfect in* our *Weakneſs* [d]. *Without him we can do nothing* [e]: every wrong Inclination, Diſſatisfaction amongſt others with every Thing within and without, in their Turns, will prevail over us: but *through Chriſt who ſtrengtheneth us, we can do all Things* [f]. To him we owe our Deliverance *from the Wrath to come* [g]: and well may we be eaſy with an inferior Share of worldly Advantages; for the beſt of us deſerve none. From him proceeds all the Good, that we think or do: and ſurely we have no Title to greater Abilities in any Reſpect, than he beſtows on us. On him depend our Hopes of future Happineſs: and the loweſt Place in it is too high for us. Yet we know not how far we may advance in ſpiritual Attainments by modeſt Perſeverance. We may be enabled in Time to out-do both ourſelves and others, and be rewarded accordingly. But however that proves, it may abundantly ſuffice us all, that we ſhall *make our Calling and Election ſure* [h], and *enter into* ſome

[d] 2 Cor. xii. 9. [e] John xv. 5. [f] Phil. iv. 13.
[g] Matth. iii. 7. [h] 2 Pet. i. 10.

Degree

Degree of *the Joy of our Lord* [i], in Return for our faithful Improvement of the Talents committed to us, be they more or fewer, if *in an honeſt and good Heart, having heard the Word, we keep it, and bring forth Fruit with Patience* [k], though it be in very different Proportions, *ſome an hundred fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty* [l].

[i] Matth. xxv. 21. [k] Luke viii. 15. [l] Matth. xiii. 8.

SERMON XI.

PSALM xxxix. 10.

I became dumb, and opened not my Mouth: for it was thy doing.

IT would be our Wiſdom and our Duty, though we had no Knowledge of Religion, to bear the Sufferings of Life with Patience, and ſubmit to the Inequalities of it with Contentment. I have therefore hitherto inforced upon you the Practice of theſe two Virtues chiefly from prudential and moral Conſiderations, though I could not altogether forbear adding ſome Inducements of Piety alſo. But theſe laſt are both ſo ſuperior to the former, and ſo neceſſary in human Circumſtances, that I muſt now dwell upon them diſtinctly.

Pains of the Body, and Uneaſineſs of the

Mind, may ſometimes be ſo grievous, that, had we no inviſible Sovereign to obey, and Nothing to hope or fear after Death, it would be hard to perſuade ourſelves to continue in Life. At leaſt we ſhould undergo in it a great deal of Miſery, with few and poor Conſolations. Thoſe indeed, which I have mentioned to you, are in many Caſes of conſiderable Uſe by themſelves: in all Caſes they may be of Service, when combined with Reflections of a higher Nature. And our groveling Minds are often more affected with feeble Reaſons, that are level to them; than with ſtrong ones, that ſeem above them: or however may beſt be quieted a while by a previous Uſe of the former, till they can be raiſed to an Ability of applying the latter. And Humanity requires, that even the weakeſt Aid be called in: but at the ſame Time, that the principal Streſs be laid on the firmeſt Support: elſe what will be the Conſequence? Only indeed what moſt of us in our Turns have probably experienced. We have been told that Grieving would not help us, without being told what would; and ſo have been left to grieve on. We have been told, that ſooner or later our Sufferings would abate, which

which is ſmall Satisfaction in the mean while; or that they would be ſhort, becauſe our Lives are ſo, which is leaving us to be miſerable, as long as we are any Thing. We have been told perhaps, that Pain is no Evil, and Virtue is its own Reward in all Circumſtances, when we were actually feeling the contrary: or that others were as wretched as we, or even more ſo; as if that could make our Wretchedneſs ceaſe. We have been bid to turn our Thoughts from our Sorrows to Amuſements; when we could not, if we would; and poſſibly ſhould have abhorred to do it, if we could. Sage Maxims and Counſels of various and contradictory Sorts, have been urged upon us, which had no Authority or Weight to make their Way into our Hearts: but we have remained in the Condition, which poor *Job* expreſſes to his Friends: *I have heard many ſuch Things: miſerable Comforters are ye all*[a]. Or though Men have ever ſo few Sufferings, yet, without religious Views, they may have ſo few Enjoyments, and thoſe ſo low, that a rational Soul muſt diſdain them, and feel its Exiſtence to be inſipid and unſatisfactory. Or, however content, upon Force, to acquieſce

[a] Job xvi. 2.

after a Sort in our own Condition, we may ſtill either be perſuaded, that the general State of Things upon the Whole is wrong and unhappy, or doubt ſo greatly whether it be right and good, that the World may appear very gloomy and comfortleſs to a benevolent Mind.

If therefore we deſire to paſs through it with Complacency, we muſt extend our Thoughts further, like the Pſalmiſt in the Text; and conſider ourſelves, as in the Hands of God: for then, whatever happens, or whatever is wanting, to us or to any one, we ſhall ſee Cauſe to ſubmit to it, compoſedly and placidly, without objecting. *I became dumb, and opened not my Mouth: for it was thy doing.*

The Creator of all Things is evidently, as ſuch, Lord of all Things: and hath a Right to place us in what Station, and expoſe us to what Accidents he pleaſes; provided the Being, which he hath given us, be not, on the Whole, without our Fault, worſe than not being. For *who art thou, O Man, that replieſt againſt God? ſhall the Thing formed ſay unto him that formed it, Why haſt thou made me*

me thus [b]*? Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own* [c]*?* He can have no Need, no Temptation to uſe us unjuſtly: and, without any, we never uſe one another ſo: which Knowledge alone is enough to produce in us a conſiderable Degree of dutiful Submiſſion. If what we diſlike in our Condition were the Effect of mere Chance or fatal Neceſſity, we might rebel in our Hearts againſt it. But a Principle of yielding to the lawful Authority of an almighty Ruler is Part of human Nature. Our Circumſtances perhaps are diſadvantageous, or even our Sufferings great. But if we look diligently into our Temper and Behaviour, have we not deſerved all that we undergo, have we not deſerved much worſe? And if ſo, ſurely we ſhould ſay in our Hearts, with poor penitent *Eli, It is the Lord; let him do what ſeemeth him good* [d]*:* and with *Jeremiah, Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins? Let us ſearch and try our Ways, and turn again to the Lord* [e]. Perhaps alſo, the Uneaſineſs, which we feel, whether inflicted for our Tranſgreſſions or not, is more than overbalanced by

[b] Rom. ix. 20. [c] Matth. xx. 15. [d] 1 Sam. iii. 18. [e] Lam. iii. 39, 40.

the Comforts that we enjoy. Our Impatience may lead us into great Miſtakes in this Matter: but God is liable to none. Or if, at preſent, Wretchedneſs preponderates, he can eaſily make us a Compenſation, either here or hereafter: nay, if Juſtice requires it, he certainly will. And *it is good, that a Man ſhould both hope, and quietly wait for the Salvation of the Lord*[f]. In the Midſt of Heathen Darkneſs indeed, there may to ſome have ſeemed Cauſe of Doubt, eſpecially on trying Occaſions, whether the Adminiſtration of Things were juſt or not; and, ſuppoſing it to be ſo on the Whole, whether it was or could be ſo in Regard of each particular Perſon. Now theſe, the more Love and Zeal they had for what was right, the more they muſt be diſſatisfied with what appeared to be wrong: and therefore might be excuſable in a Degree, if they murmured againſt the Diſpenſations of Providence towards themſelves, or others. Some again, impatient of the Evils of this Life, ignorant of the Means of procuring Strength to bear them, and perhaps alſo doubtful at beſt of another to reward them, might, without any heinous Depravity, yield

[f] Lam. iii. 26.

to

to the Temptation of thinking themſelves allowed or even called, by the Author of their Beings, to put a voluntary End to them, whenever they were oppreſſed by Sufferings hard to ſupport. But in the clearer Light of our Days, either of theſe Diſpoſitions would be unſpeakably more criminal.

Yet, were we only to believe, that God will do us no Wrong, our Submiſſion to his Will, though it might well be full of the profoundeſt Reverence, would not be accompanied with the higheſt Degree of Eſteem. But happily he hath alſo ſhewn us great Kindneſs. For every Pleaſure that we enjoy, every Capacity of receiving Pleaſure that belongs to our inward or outward Frame, proceeds from his Bounty. And how do we commonly behave upon it? Yield ourſelves up to his Diſpoſal with a chearful Truſt in him? No: repine and complain, that he hath not done more for us, or that he doth not continue to us all that we ever had. But every Thing is more than we are intitled to. We have no Property in any Thing: we ourſelves are his Property. Our very Being is not our own: He beſtowed it, and whatever we poſſeſs in it, and that only during his Pleaſure: he may allow us as few Comforts, or mix with

them as many Afflictions as he will. *Shall we receive Good at the Hand of God, and ſhall we not receive Evil*[g]*?* All that he granted, he may withdraw at any Time: and our Concern is only to ſay with *Job*, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: bleſſed be the Name of the Lord*[h]. He might have made any one of us the very loweſt of his Creation: and if the meaneſt of the Works of his Hands hath a Claim to more than he hath vouchſafed, it hath an equal Claim to more without End: and if it is not bound to Reſignation at preſent, can never be bound to it in any Situation at all.

But though the Sovereignty of God is abſolute, we know not that he ever uſes it in an arbitrary Manner. The Scripture tells us in expreſs Terms, that he *doth not willingly afflict or grieve the Children of Men*[i]. And to think, that he limits the Happineſs of the leaſt happy of his Creatures without Cauſe, would be entertaining a diſreſpectful Notion of his glorious Attributes. *Manifold* as *his Works are*, yet *in Wiſdom hath he made them all*[k]: and *the Earth is full of the Goodneſs of the Lord*[l]. The farther Men ſee into whatever he hath done or appointed, the more Evidence they diſcern of

[g] Job ii. 10. [h] Job i. 21. [i] Lam. iii. 33.
[k] Pſ. civ. 24. [l] Pſ. xxxiii. v.

Fore-

Foreſight and Skill, of Bounty and Mercy: and therefore ought firmly to believe they take Place, even where they ſee them not. Such and ſuch Things we are apt to imagine might have been contrived more for our particular Advantage. Yet perhaps we miſtake: and what we wiſh either could not have been at all, (for many Things may be impoſſible, which we do not perceive to be ſo) or would not have been the better for us. Our Inſight into Conſequences reaches but a very little Way. In Multitudes of Caſes we are full as ignorant of what would be for our Benefit, as Children are of what would be for theirs: and ought therefore to acquieſce in the Will and the Knowledge of our heavenly Father, as we expect them to acquieſce in ours.

But ſuppoſing that granting every one of our Deſires would be an Act of Kindneſs to us: yet *the Lord is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works*[m]. Very often it is viſible, that, if we ſucceed in our Wiſhes, others muſt fail in theirs: were we to have this or that Advantage, they muſt be under proportionable Diſadvantages. And why is it not as conſiſtent with the Wiſdom and the

[m] Pſ. cxlv. 9.

Goodneſs of God to regard their Intereſts, as ours? Perhaps we deſerve it no better, perhaps not ſo well. Or if we did, or if it appeared not who would be hurt by greater Indulgence to us, it doth not follow, that no one would; and that no Inconvenience to any Part, or in any Reſpect, would ariſe from it. In this wide World the Connections of Things are innumerable: and may be very important, where they are abſolutely hidden from our View, who probably diſcern but an inconſiderable Portion of them. Subordinations are neceſſary in every Syſtem of every Kind. The low Rank and Helpleſsneſs of many Creatures fits them for our Uſe; our Advantages proceed from their Sufferings; from the very Sufferings which we inflict on them; yet they are totally ignorant of this: and how know we, what Advantages may, ſome Way, though quite different and quite inconceivable to us, proceed from our low Rank and our Sufferings? And as God hath wiſely and kindly made ſo many Orders of Beings beneath us; why may it not be as wiſely and kindly, notwithſtanding we are ignorant on what Account, that he hath made us juſt ſuch as we are, and no higher or happier?

But though, in all Likelihood, we can ſee only a few of the Reaſons of God's Ways, yet ſeveral we may ſee, at leaſt in ſome Meaſure. For Inſtance: He governs the World by general Laws. On ſome Occaſions indeed he hath openly departed from them, and wrought Miracles: on many, we have Cauſe to think he ſecretly reſtrains and varies them for gracious Purpoſes, or juſt Correction: but were he not to obſerve them in the ordinary Courſe of Things, we ſhould neither know, what to expect, nor how to proceed. If ſolid Bodies did not weigh downwards, if Bodies in Motion did not communicate their Motion to others, if Winds had not a ſtrong Force, if Rain was not carried about by them, if Fire did not heat and conſume, if ſharp Inſtruments did not cut, the whole Frame of Nature would be diſordered, and ſtop. If what tends to deſtroy our Lives or our Healths did not give us Pain, we ſhould take no ſufficient Care to avoid it. If any one Thing almoſt, that we know, were to fail of commonly producing its natural Effect, very general Miſchiefs, or however Inconveniences, would follow: and yet, if they are left to pro-

duce their Effects, grievous Diſtreſſes to Particulars, from Time to Time, muſt be the Conſequence. Therefore we ſhould learn to reſpect the Regulations of Providence, though occaſionally we ſuffer by them. We honour, if we are at all reaſonable, whatever Laws of our Country we know to be for the common Good, though often greatly oppoſite to our own private Intereſt: and ſurely leſs Honour cannot be due to the Laws of Heaven.

He, who could make ſuch a World as this, may doubtleſs have, throughout his Conduct of it, wiſe and good Ends in his View, of which we cannot poſſibly form any Conception. Were God to queſtion us, as once he did *Job*; *Where waſt thou, when I laid the Foundations of the Earth? declare, if thou haſt Underſtanding* [n]: our Anſwer muſt be, what one of his Friends acknowledged, *We are of Yeſterday, and know Nothing* [o]: or as the Book of *Wiſdom* expreſſes it more largely; *What Man is he, that can know the Counſel of God? or who can think, what the Will of the Lord is? For the Thoughts of mortal Men are miſerable, and our Devices are but uncertain* [p]. Indeed Creatures of our own Rank, only of Abilities perhaps a little

[n] Job xxxviii. 4. [o] Job viii. 9. [p] Wiſd. ix. 13. 14.

ſuperior,

ſuperior, lay Schemes of which we ſhould never have the leaſt Notion, and compaſs them by Methods which we ſhould never ſuſpect, if we were not told them. Now God hath not told us all his Ways, and all the Reaſons of them. Therefore with Reſpect to many Things, we muſt apprehend him to ſay to us, as the bleſſed *Jeſus* did to *Peter: What I do thou knoweſt not now, but thou ſhalt know hereafter*[q]. If we obſerve with Attention, and enquire with Humility, we ſhall find, ſooner or later, in various Inſtances, even while we continue on this Earth, that ſeeming Evil is real Good in ſome Reſpect or other. But a future Life will draw back the Veil from Multitudes of the divine Diſpenſations, and ſhew us Beauty and Order, where Nothing appeared to us but Horror and Confuſion. Yet even then we muſt not expect to know the Whole: nor are the higheſt Angels capable of fathoming all the Depths of the univerſal Providence of *the only wiſe God*[r].

Faith is the Evidence of Things not ſeen[s]: and implicit Faith is one of the firſt and greateſt Duties of Creatures to their Creator. We pay it to Men like ourſelves every Day: and

[q] John xiii. 7. [r] Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Tim. i. 17. Jude. Verſe 25. [s] Heb. xi. 1.

con-

contentedly truſt our Fortunes, our Healths, our Lives with them, in Conſequence of it; notwithſtanding they may often miſtake, nay ſometimes mean us Ill. Surely then, without a ſingle Murmur, without the leaſt Heſitation, we may truſt every Thing, truſt Body and Soul with God. For are they wiſer and better, are we wiſer and better, than he? Are we not ſafer in his Hands, than in our own? He doth not do all for us, that we wiſh. But perhaps we wiſh indiſcreetly for what would be much Harm to us. Or if not, we think it very fitting, that our Servants and Inferiors, when we command them, ſhould undergo a great deal for the Accompliſhment of our Purpoſes; and that Multitudes of Perſons, when required by Authority, ſhould riſque every Thing dear to them, for the general Welfare: why is it not fitting then, that we, in our Turn, ſhould both give up Satisfactions, and bear Uneaſineſſes, to ſerve the good Purpoſes of God? We are willing, I hope, to ſuffer more than a little for our Friends, for our Country, for our Prince: why ſhould we not be as willing to ſuffer every Thing for the Sake of Mankind, and the Syſtem of which we are Part, when the Sovereign of all demands it? We ſee not indeed perhaps, in what

what Manner our Sufferings or our Diſadvantages benefit others, or make the general State of Things better. But *here is the Patience and the Faith of the Saints* [t]. Thus they have the Means of ſhewing Patience in every Situation, built on the Faith, that all Things are conducted well. So far they are conducted well for us, that in our loweſt and moſt afflicted Condition, when the Face of God ſeems hid from us, his Eye watches over us; and while his Hand is heavieſt upon us, it is leading us to our proper Share of Happineſs. Therefore, as the Apoſtle exhorts, *be content with ſuch Things as ye have: for he hath ſaid, I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee* [u]. But all Matters are conducted in the higheſt Degree well for the Whole: and doubting it is thinking ill of our heavenly Father; for which we can never have Cauſe. Nothing can win upon him to do Wrong, Nothing deter him from doing Right, Nothing reſiſt his Power; Nothing miſlead his Judgement, Nothing eſcape his Attention, who ſees through the Univerſe at once. He hath fixed the proper Laws and Limits for every Part, and we have no Claim to be exempted. Therefore when we feel our-

[t] Rev. xiii. 10. [u] Heb xiii. 5.

ſelves

ſelves inclined to object, to be moved with Indignation, and *tear ourſelves in our Anger*, as *Job*'s Friends accuſe him of doing, we ſhould check our Vehemence, as they check his, by aſking, *Shall the Earth be forſaken for Thee, and the Rock be moved out of its Place* [*] ? Shall the Foundations, on which the great Syſtem of Nature ſtands, and by which its good State is preſerved, be ſhaken for the ſeeming, or the real, Benefit of this or that Perſon ? If of any one, why not of every one : for what are we more than others ? And then Nothing can follow, but univerſal Inconſiſtence and Confuſion.

Still the Duty of Submiſſion to God's good Pleaſure doth not require from us Inſenſibility ; for we cannot be inſenſible, of what we undergo, or what we want, or what ſuperior Advantages others enjoy. It doth not forbid us to think the preſent State of Things, were we not to look beyond it, irregular and diſorderly ; provided we look on it as Part of a regular Whole, that is worthy of its Author. For the Afflictions and Inequalities of this Life, are a ſtrong Argument for a future one. And though entertaining too low an Opinion

[*] Job xviii. 4.

of the Wiſdom and Goodneſs, which appears now in the Adminiſtration of the World, may often proceed from a bad Temper, and produce or ſtrengthen impious Opinions; yet ſome may undervalue or diſlike beyond Reaſon what they ſee, merely becauſe they conceive they are bound to excite in their Hearts the higheſt poſſible Eſteem of what they hope for: and theſe, though miſtaken, may be in the higheſt Degree religious. Again: Thinking with Complacency, how agreeable it would be to us, were Heaven to change our Lot in this or that Reſpect, or place us in the Condition of this or that Perſon; nay, wiſhing it were actually done, provided the Wiſh be formed on the Condition, that ſuch were his Will, who knows beſt; nay, though that Condition be not always explicitly in our Thoughts, yet if we are habitually diſpoſed never abſolutely to deſire that may be, which God ſees fit ſhould not be, we are ſtill within the Bounds of Innocence. Indeed the further we ſuffer our Fancies and Inclinations to carry us in this Road, the more ſlippery Ground we continually tread upon: but thus far we may advance, and not fall. In Caſes of poſitive Sufferings we may take yet another Step: may

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bemoan ourſelves, though not complain of God; may expreſs in our Devotions what he knows we cannot but feel, and lay before him our natural Cravings of Relief. For thus *David*, after the fulleſt, and undoubtedly ſincereſt, Profeſſion of Reſignation, made in the Text, immediately ſubjoins, *Take away thy Stroke from me: I am even conſumed by Means of thy heavy Hand* [x]. Thus alſo good Perſons in all Ages have ſought and found Eaſe by ſubmiſſive Applications to the Throne of Mercy. And if ſometimes Expoſtulations have eſcaped them, which ſeem not ſubmiſſive enough, their cooler Thoughts have doubtleſs corrected them, and no Failure can be intitled to a more favourable Conſtruction. But if our Condition be a tolerably comfortable one, or might be ſuch, if we would let it; then we have much more Need to lower and ſuppreſs our Deſires of further Advantages, than to inflame them by turning them into Prayers. Not that we ſin, if we endeavour to raiſe ourſelves into a ſtill more agreeable Situation, or if we intreat God to bleſs our Endeavours, as far as he judges it convenient. Reſignation is very different, not only from Deſpondence,

[x] Pſ. xxxix. 11.

which

which rather implies Diſſatisfaction and Diſtruſt, but from Indolence, which may be totally deſtitute of any Sentiment of Piety. And though an indolent Perſon can perhaps be more eaſily reſigned, yet an active one can be more certain, whether he is ſo in Reality, and from a Principle of Conſcience. But the Activity exerted by us, when in good Circumſtances, to improve them into better, ſhould always be accompanied with peculiar Moderation of Deſire: and if we may lawfully pray at all to be rich or great, or in any Reſpect eminent and admired; we ought certainly to pray with far more Earneſtneſs, that we may have Nothing that will endanger our Piety or Virtue; but may always be humble and contented, and pleaſed with whatever the diſtributing Wiſdom of the moſt High allots us.

Indulging ourſelves in the contrary Diſpoſition, is diſputing with God the Government of his own World: and either denying him to be wiſe and good, or wiſhing that he were not, but would order Things ill for the Whole, that our Share might be more to our Mind. Now what a dreadful Sort of Spirit is this, and where can it end? Therefore let us be ſatisfied

tisfied with the Place which he hath aſſigned us, and bear quietly the Burthens which he hath laid upon us. We often ſubmit with very little Reluctance to the Treatment which we receive from unjuſt Men: why ſhould we not ſubmit without any to the Pleaſure of a perfectly juſt God? Could he ever be partial in our Favour, he might afterwards change his Mind, and be partial againſt us, and ſo we could never be ſecure of any Thing. But now *his Righteouſneſs ſtandeth like the ſtrong Mountains*, which cannot be overturned; at the ſame Time that *his Judgements are like the great Deep* [y], which cannot be fathomed. *Clouds and Darkneſs are round about him:* but *Righteouſneſs and Judgement are the Habitation of his Throne* [z].

Some Perſons, it may be, are tempted to repine not ſo much at any Want of Happineſs or Feeling of Miſery, which they experience themſelves; as at the general Quantity of Wretchedneſs and Prevalence of Wickedneſs, which they obſerve in the World. *My Feet were almoſt gone, my Treadings had well nigh ſlipt. And why? I was grieved at the wicked, I do alſo ſee the ungodly in ſuch Proſperity* [a].

[y] Pſ. xxxvi. 6. [z] Pſ. xcvii. 2. [a] Pſ. lxxiii. 2, 3.

And

And indeed Concern on this Account ſeems not only on many Occaſions uſeful in human Circumſtances, but inſeparable in human Nature from Benevolence and Love of Virtue. But this is only becauſe our Nature is imperfect. For God ſees infinitely more bad Things than we do, and feels an infinitely ſtronger Diſapprobation of them, conſidered in themſelves. Yet they cauſe not the leaſt Diminution of his Happineſs. For he knows, that, through the Direction of his wiſe Providence, they will be the Means of the greateſt Good: and therefore we ought to believe it; and be influenced by that Faith, as far as we are able. But many pretend, and perhaps imagine, that they are deeply concerned at the Growth of Crimes, and the Diſcouragements and Decay of Goodneſs, when in Truth their chief, if not only, Sorrow is, that their Party is not uppermoſt, or their Friends have not ſucceeded; or ſuch as they diſlike, have: and were but theſe Things otherwiſe, the World might be as bad or worſe than it is, without their being in the leaſt uneaſy at it. Some, on the other Hand, care very little, whether right or wrong Behaviour prevails amongſt Men, and dignify their blameable Indifference with the ſpecious

Name of Reſignation. Now both theſe Faults muſt be avoided. The Cauſe, in which we are zealous, ought to be that of Piety and Virtue, and the Good of our Fellow-creatures: and for this we ſhould have all the Zeal, that will excite us to ſuch Behaviour in Support of it, as belongs to our Station. But we muſt neither attempt any Thing beyond proper Bounds; nor, if our juſteſt Attempts prove unſucceſsful, and Appearances in any particular Caſe, or in general, are ever ſo bad, muſt we either think ill of God; or worſe of Men, than they deſerve; or give Way to Impatience, or Deſpair, or immoderate Grief; but meekly *commit ourſelves*, and every Thing, *to him that judgeth righteouſly* [b]. Before we perceive what the Event of our Endeavours will be, we may entertain Hopes; but they muſt be conditional, *if the Lord will* [c], not abſolute; and moderate not vehement. When we are diſappointed, if our Deſires were ſuch as we need not have formed, we may juſtly be expected to give them up more intirely: if they were founded in our Nature, ſome involuntary Concern will be felt; and inſtead of being terrified at it, as heinous Guilt, we ſhould gently, yet ſtudiouſly, check

[b] 1 Pet. ii. 23. [c] James iv. 15.

it,

it, as mere Weakneſs. But the Notion, that we either ought or may allowably indulge ourſelves in Diſſatisfaction or Grief, is utterly to be rejected. And the ſooner and the more completely we quiet every painful Feeling, and bring our Minds to a calm Acquieſcence in the good Pleaſure of God; the better we are, and the happier it will be for us.

Other Motives to bear Evil patiently and contentedly are to be ſought for from different Quarters, as the Circumſtances of the Caſe require; are often hard to find; and when found, have often ſmall Weight and Influence. But Reſignation to the Will of our gracious heavenly Father, is one and the ſame Inducement, that naturally preſents itſelf to our Thoughts; is equally ſuited to all Occaſions; and while it awes us with the Conſideration of his abſolutely ſovereign Authority, ſooths us with the Aſſurance, that *though he cauſe Grief, yet he will have Compaſſion, according to the Multitude of his Mercies*[d]. Again: Reſiſtance to the Purpoſes of our Fellow-creatures may frequently prevail: but Reluctance againſt thoſe of our Maker never can. Therefore Sentiments of dutiful Submiſſion ſpare us

[d] Lam. iii. 32.

the Pain of unavailing inward Struggles, leſſen every Suffering, prepare us for every Trial. If we will not yield with Meekneſs to the Diſpoſal of God, how ſhall we bear Injuries from one another; how indeed ſhall we refrain from being injurious, when our Intereſts and Inclinations prompt us? The Practice of ſelf-denying Duties, without leaning on Heaven for Support, is too hard a Taſk for human Nature. But ſuch as not only believe the Precept, but have formed themſelves to feel the Impreſſions of Reſignation, are in Proportion ſuperior to all Difficulties. Their Spirits are calm; and inſtead of plunging raſhly into deeper Diſtreſſes and even Guilt, as the impatient do, they find their Way, if any one can be found, out of every Perplexity. By excluding eager Hopes and high Deſires of earthly Good, this pious Principle excludes alſo jealous Envy, keen Reſentment, tormenting Fears, bitter Diſappointments, and final Diſlike of every Thing. He that gives himſelf up into the Hands of God, with unfeigned Approbation of the Divine Conduct in whatever may befall him, will act as he ought in all Emergencies, with Uprightneſs and Alacrity, with Courage and Honour; will ſuffer with a compoſed

poſed and even Temper; will thus give Teſtimony to the Efficacy of Religion, and vindicate the Diſpenſations of Providence to Mankind. Nor can it fail, but ſo dutiful a Subject to the King of all, ſo faithful a Confeſſor, ſo ready a Martyr, if Need be, in his Cauſe, will obtain from him the ſtrongeſt Conſolation here, and the ampleſt Recompence hereafter. Therefore, let us pray earneſtly for this bleſſed Diſpoſition, and improve ourſelves in it by continual Exerciſes of rational Devotion: ſtir up our Faith and our Love, when they languiſh; recover *our Steps*, whenever they *had well-nigh ſlipped* [e]: *put our Truſt in the Lord, and be doing Good: delight in him, and he ſhall give us our Heart's Deſire: commit our Way unto him, and he ſhall bring it to paſs; bring forth our Righteouſneſs as the Light, and our Judgement as the Noon-day* [f].

[e] Pſ. lxxiii. 2. [f] Pſ. xxxvii. 3—6.

SERMON XII.

EPH. v. 20.

Giving Thanks always for all Things unto God and the Father, in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.

I HAVE endeavoured, in three Diſcourſes, to inſtruct you in the Duties of Patience, Contentment and Reſignation: each riſing higher than the other in the Scale of right Diſpoſition, and advancing further from mere Virtue into the ſuperior Region of Piety. Happy, in Compariſon of others, are ſuch as poſſeſs theſe Attainments in any good Degree: but even they have another Step to take; for *yet ſhew I unto you a more excellent Way*[a]. It is not ſufficient, that we bear Sufferings of every Kind with all the Compoſure, which our Nature admits; that we reflect on the various

[a] 1 Cor. xii. 31.

Diſadvantages of our reſpective Conditions without repining; that we yield ourſelves up to the juſt and wiſe Diſpoſal of the ſovereign Lord of the Univerſe: we are bound alſo to feel Gratitude and expreſs Thankfulneſs to our heavenly Father continually for whatever in the Courſe of his Providence befalls us; and this we are to perform, as Diſciples of his bleſſed Son our Saviour. Let us conſider diſtinctly the ſeveral Parts of this moſt ſublime Precept: for certainly higher we cannot go.

I. We are to *give Thanks always to God.*

II. We are to do it *for all Things.*

III. We are to do it *in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.*

I. We are to give Thanks always to God and the Father.

The different Orders of ſenſible Beings were created every one for ſuch a Degree of Happineſs, as God ſaw to be moſt for the Good of the Whole; and rational Beings were created to confeſs and celebrate his Bounty to themſelves and the reſt of the World. Giving Glory is the due Return for having experienced Goodneſs. It is therefore neceſſarily expected from us by him, who *hath made all Things for himſelf*;

himſelf[b]; and muſt require them to anſwer the End, for which they were formed. We are ſenſible it is extremely wrong and unworthy, when we fail of owning the Favours, which we receive from each other. And what ſhocking Baſeneſs is it then to forget his Liberality, who hath *given* us *Life and Breath, and all Things richly to enjoy*[c]! For how inconſiderable is whatever any one of us can do for the Perſon whom he loves beſt, compared to what God hath done for us all! Our very Capacity of receiving Pleaſure from our Fellow-creatures proceeds from our Creator, as well as every other Source of Joy, which we feel to ſpring up within ourſelves. And we feel much leſs of both, than we might and ought. We are ſo taken up and diſquieted, with imaginary or ſmall Misfortunes, with Uneaſineſſes and Pains for the moſt Part very ſupportable, with groundleſs or exceſſive Diſcontents and Reſentments, with needleſs Purſuits, and immoderate Hopes and Fears, that we ſuffer Multitudes of Satisfactions, which Providence brings perpetually in our Way, to paſs by us unperceived or unnoticed. Yet many of them we ſhould find to be great Bleſſings; for we

[b] Prov. xvi. 4. [c] Acts xvii. 25. 1 Tim. vi. 17.

frequently

frequently overlook the very greateſt that we have: the Means granted us by Reaſon and Scripture, ſituated as we are in a Land of Light and Liberty, of improving in religious Knowledge, in Rightneſs of Heart and Goodneſs of Life; the Delights of ſocial, and in particular of domeſtic Friendlineſs; the continual Feaſts, which mere Health and Strength afford, if they are enjoyed with cautious Innocence, prudent Activity, and a chearful Equality of Temper. Inconſiderately throwing away, or ſupinely diſregarding, ſuch bountiful Proviſions for our well-being, is ſurely the moſt dreadful Waſte, of which we can be guilty. But even the lower Benefits, Entertainments, and Amuſements of Life, even thoſe of them in which all Perſons may ſhare, ſuch as the very opening of our Eyes and looking around, ſuch as the Uſe of every one of our Senſes, may give us, though ſingly but little Matters, yet being inceſſantly within our Reach, ariſe on the Whole to a vaſt Amount. We do receive a great deal of Pleaſure from them: and we might receive much more, if we would frame our Minds to obſerve and be pleaſed with the ſeveral Objects and Occurrences,

currences, that preſent themſelves to us almoſt every Moment.

But unhappily even they, who imagine they are the moſt judiciouſly attentive to enjoy from what they like, or from every Thing about them, all that they can, are very apt to conſider but few Things, if any, as Matter of Thankfulneſs to God. Yet evidently Nothing, which we have Cauſe to think in any Degree good, ought to eſcape being conſidered in this View. For he is the ſole original Fountain of Good, of every Sort of Good: not only *the Father of Mercies, and God of all Comfort*[d], with Reſpect to our higher Expectations; but the *Giver of Rain and fruitful Seaſons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladneſs*[e]; who *openeth his Hand, and ſatisfieth the Deſire*, the very loweſt Deſire, of *every living Thing*[f]. Now would we but reflect on our various Enjoyments in this Light; as Marks and Inſtances of the Good-will and Kindneſs of the great Lord of all; as Preſents, which he graciouſly condeſcends to make us; it would raiſe the Worth and Dignity of them inexpreſſibly; it would impreſs us with the ſtrongeſt Conviction of their Guilt, who *when they know*

[d] 2 Cor. i. 3. [e] Acts xiv. 17. [f] Pſ. cxlv. 16.

God,

God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful[g]; it would inſpire us with a moſt pleaſing Love and Reverence to him, preſerve us very powerfully from ſinning againſt him by the Abuſe of his own Gifts; and ſupport us under whatever we might ſuffer in this World, by the Aſſurance that he, of whoſe Bounty we have ſo large Experience here, hath Bleſſings infinitely ſuperior in Store for us hereafter.

Let us therefore ſtir up and cheriſh in our Breaſts, a Habit of conſtant Thankfulneſs to Heaven: bear always in our Thoughts the Value of thoſe Faculties and Powers of Body and Mind with which we are endowed, of the Health and Eaſe which we enjoy or have enjoyed, and remember that *He it is who made us, and not we ourſelves*[h]. Let us reckon over the manifold Comforts and Accommodations of Life, the Relations and Friends, the agreeable Acquaintance, the fair Eſteem, of which we are poſſeſſed, and conſider that all theſe are the Donations of a kind Providence. Let us raiſe our Views higher: contemplate the ineſtimable Benefits of our Redemption; of the Precepts, the Examples, the Promiſes of holy Writ;

[g] Rom. i. 21. [h] Pſ. c. 2.

the

the Inſtructions given us by God's Miniſters in public, by good Perſons and good Books in private; the Freedom, which we and all around us have of worſhipping our Maker, according to our Conſciences. Let us recollect, at the ſame Time, the Security of our Perſons and Properties from Oppreſſion in all other Reſpects, as well as this: that the whole Exerciſe of civil Authority over us, is legal and mild; that no one *will* or can *harm us, if we are Followers of that which is good*[1]. Let us compare our own Condition in theſe Particulars, with that of the Multitudes elſewhere, indeed of moſt Men throughout the Earth, who ſit in Darkneſs and Bondage, temporal, and ſpiritual. Yet even they have Cauſe to praiſe God. For the moſt deficient in worldly Advantages have many Conſolations, if they will attend to them properly: the moſt ignorant ſhall be accountable only in Proportion to their Means of Knowledge; and the moſt faulty ſhall be judged with every due Allowance to the Propenſities of their Nature, and the Prejudices of their Education. But how much more liberal is our Share of

[1] 1 Pet. iii. 13.

what-

whatever *pertains unto Life and Godlineſs* [k]: and what Pleaſure ſhould we take in paying ſuitable Acknowledgements! *Bleſſed are they that dwell in thy Houſe: they will be alway praiſing thee* [l].

But beſides being thankful to God *alway*, we ought,

II. To be thankful to him *for all Things*.

That the Gift of Life, taking the Whole of it together, is juſtly a Ground of Thankſgiving, we cannot queſtion, without queſtioning alſo the Goodneſs of the Giver. Yet whether we are indeed thankful, and to what Degree, for the Sum total of it united, we ſhould do well to examine ourſelves. But the Apoſtle expreſsly enjoins us to be ſo for each Part ſeparately. Be it ever ſo afflictive, we have deſerved much worſe: and therefore ought to bleſs our merciful Father, that the Blow came no ſooner, that it was no heavier, that it was repeated no oftener. But then, beſides, the ſame Apoſtle hath told us, *that all Things work together for Good to them who love God* [m]. We are extremely prone to think otherwiſe, when any unpleaſing Occurrence

[k] 2 Pet. i. 3. [l] Pſ. lxxxiv. 4. [m] Rom. viii. 28.

befalls

befalls us; and to ſay with good old *Jacob*, *All theſe Things are againſt me*[n]. But as he found moſt unexpectedly, that the Grievances, which he bemoaned, were the very Inſtruments of his Happineſs throughout the Remainder of his Days: ſo have very many ſince, and ſo very poſſibly may we, experience the like unforeſeen Connection. I have ſhewn you, in ſpeaking on the Subjects related to this, from what Evils our Sufferings or Diſadvantages often preſerve us, what Benefits they often procure us. Indeed we frequently acknowledge, that to ſuch or ſuch a Misfortune or Diſappointment we are indebted for our Eſcape from deſtructive Dangers, or our Attainment of moſt deſirable Bleſſings. But we might diſcern many more Events of this Nature, would we look for them: and we ſhould believe there are ſuch very commonly, when we cannot ſee them. It is an Act of Duty owing to him, whoſe Power and Wiſdom can eaſily bring Good out of Evil: and an Act of Prudence, which we owe to ourſelves, as the ſure Way of turning every gloomy Appearance into a cheerful one.

[n] Gen. xlii. 36.

And were our Troubles and Croſſes never to end in augmenting our temporal Welfare, yet they may and will, if it be not our own Fault, contribute to a far greater Felicity, our moral and ſpiritual Improvement. Sometimes we cannot avoid perceiving their medicinal and ſalutary Tendency: often we might perceive it by the Help of a little ſerious Conſideration: and they may be extremely requiſite, when at the Time we perceive it not. For both our outward Dangers and our inward Weakneſſes are very commonly unſeen by us: whence we imagine ourſelves to be in perfect Safety, while we are really in imminent Hazard. But the great Phyſician of our Souls knows our true and whole State: and it is unſpeakable Goodneſs in him, to apply the Remedies, be they ever ſo rough, which our Caſe demands and a due Regimen obſerved on our Part will render effectual. When a needful, but harſh Operation is preſcribed to be performed on us by one of our Fellow-creatures, though we are ſenſible we muſt feel from it exquiſite Pain, yet we chuſe to undergo it, we deſire to have it completely gone through without ſparing us; and even during the Smart,

Smart, we bleſs the ſkilful Hand, that inflicts the Wound. Surely then we ſhould bear as willingly, at leaſt, the *Chaſtenings of the Lord*, and *neither faint* nor murmur *when we are rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chaſteneth; and ſcourgeth every Son, whom he receiveth*[o].

The worldly Advantages, that we have wiſhed for in vain, might not only have failed to produce in us a due Senſe of Gratitude towards God, which alone would have been heinous Guilt, but might have tempted us to Irregularities, to Pride, to injurious Behaviour, to a ruinous Choice of the good Things of this Life for our Portion: whereas the Uneaſineſſes and Sorrows, that we groan under, may ſecure us from vicious Courſes, may teach us Humility and Compaſſion, may raiſe our Affections above earthly Objects. *Before I was afflicted*, ſaith the Pſalmiſt, *I went aſtray: but now have I kept thy Word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes*[p]. *No Chaſtening for the preſent*, ſaith the Apoſtle, *ſeemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheleſs, afterwards, it*

[o] Heb. xii. 5, 6. [p] Pſ. cxix. 67, 71.

yieldeth the peaceable Fruits of Righteouſneſs unto them, which are exerciſed thereby [q]. If *Men be holden in Cords of Affliction*, ſaith *Elihu* in *Job, then God ſheweth them their Work, and their Tranſgreſſions, that they have exceeded: he openeth their Ear to Diſcipline; and commandeth, that they return from Iniquity. If they obey and ſerve him, they ſhall ſpend their Days in Proſperity, and their Years in Pleaſure* [r].

Whatever makes us better, will ordinarily make us happier even now. For our Faults and Follies are what uſually bring on our Troubles: and in that Caſe Amendment is the likelieſt Way to remove them, and prevent more. Or ſuppoſe it proves otherwiſe, mere Conſciouſneſs of Amendment will adminiſter no ſmall Conſolation. And as there is very commonly pitiable Wretchedneſs hid under ſhewiſh Proſperity, ſo there may be ſweet Tranquillity of Mind under ſore Calamities. *In the Multitude of the Sorrows, that I had in my Heart, thy Comforts have refreſhed my Soul* [s]. Innocence gives great Joy in the Midſt of Sufferings: why may not Piety, ſuperadded to Innocence or to Penitence, give

[q] Heb. xii. 11. [r] Job xxxvi. 8—11. [s] Pſ. xciv. 19.

greater?

greater? Few, alas, are qualified for ſuch Feelings; and therefore the Mention of them may ſeem ſtrange: but as they are perfectly rational, we may juſtly, on the Authority of Scripture, believe God to excite and ſtrengthen them in devout Minds to ſuch a Degree, as to make them abundantly an Over-balance to the heavieſt Preſſures of this Life. Or if they be not, the Chriſtian Temper, formed and cultivated within us by the Means of theſe Preſſures, will fit us for higher Rewards in the Life to come. So that indeed the Burthens, which our Maker lays upon us, are intended by him, who *knoweth* our *Frame*, and *whereof we are made*[t], as a requiſite Preparation for our trueſt Good: *that we may be ſtrengthened with all Might, according to his glorious Power, unto Patience and long Suffering with Joyfulneſs; and give Thanks unto the Father, who maketh us meet to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light*[u]. Were we but influenced by this Conſideration as we ought, we ſhould ſay to God with pleaſing Wonder, what *Job* ſaith by Way of diſcontented Expoſtulation. *What is Man, that thou ſhouldeſt magnify him* thus; *that thou*

[t] Pſ. ciii. 14. [u] Col. i. 11, 12.

ſhouldeſt ſet thine Heart upon him; that thou ſhouldeſt *viſit him every Morning, and try him every Moment*[w]?

But ſuppoſing the Trials we undergo, ſhould not improve our Virtues at all, yet they muſt be deemed a very ſevere Exerciſe of them: and even were ſuch Exerciſe to impair ſome of them a little; provided it be not through undutiful Miſbehaviour under them, but merely from Weakneſs, contrary to our Wills and beſt Endeavours, undoubtedly every ſingle Circumſtance of our Caſe will be equitably conſidered in our Favour. It is true, our moſt laborious Service hath no Merit in it: but through the unmerited Goodneſs of God, if we *endure Hardneſs as good Soldiers of Jeſus Chriſt*[x], we ſhall be plentifully recompenſed by *the Captain of our Salvation*[y]. For, as St. *Paul* triumphantly expreſſes it, *All Things are for our Sakes*, every Diſpenſation of Providence is deſigned to increaſe our future Bleſſedneſs, *that the abundant Grace may, through the Thankſgiving of many, redound to the Glory of God. For our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more ex-*

[w] Job vii. 17, 18. [x] 2 Tim. ii. 3. [y] Heb. ii. 10.

ceeding and eternal Weight of Glory [z]. Therefore let us, like him, as well as we can, *rejoice in Tribulations: knowing that Tribulation worketh Patience; and Patience, Experience; and Experience, Hope; and Hope maketh not aſhamed* [a].

Still we are by no Means to run, either wilfully or careleſsly, into unneceſſary Troubles; or expoſe ourſelves by Indolence and Neglect to unneceſſary Loſſes, Failures, and Diſappointments: for under ſuch we have no Promiſe that Heaven will ſupport us, or make us the leaſt Compenſation for them. But when the Hand of Providence brings them on, *God is faithful, who will not ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able* [b]: and ſince he will alſo reward us for bearing what he ſtrengthens us to bear, well may we *count it all Joy, when* led by him, *we fall into divers Temptations* [c].

Joy of this Kind indeed, will unavoidably be mixed, in our weak Natures, with an Allay of Uneaſineſs, and probably no ſmall one. But be it ever ſo great, were it enough to extinguiſh for the preſent all Feeling of Pleaſure and Thankfulneſs intirely; yet we may

[z] 2 Cor. iv. 15, 17. [a] Rom. v. 2—5. [b] 1 Cor. x. 13. [c] James i. 2.

certainly reflect, that we have Cauſe to be pleaſed and thankful, if we could. And this alone will make our worſt Sufferings much more tolerable, than if we were to conſider them as ſo much Evil without any Thing to counterbalance it. Beſides, by looking on every Thing in ſo animating a View, Appearances will gradually change for the better, the Vigour of our Minds will augment, and we ſhall come to ſmile at Events, that formerly would have terrified and overwhelmed us. But this is wholly on Suppoſition, that, with our heartieſt Efforts, we join our moſt earneſt Prayers for *Grace to help in Time of Need* [d]. The Attacks upon us are often ſudden, violent, and long: our own Abilities, we have had but too much Proof, are inconſiderable; and apt to fail us the moſt, when we depend on them with the fulleſt Confidence. But the divine Aſſiſtance can enable us to do every Thing: and, though our Beginnings be feeble, yet, if we ſincerely truſt in God, and faithfully exert the Powers he will give us, *out of Weakneſs we ſhall be made ſtrong* [e], and not only *run with Patience the Race that is ſet before us* [f], but *greatly rejoice that now for a*

[d] Heb. iv. 16. [e] Heb. xi. 34. [f] Heb. xii. 1.

Seaſon,

Seaſon, if Need be, we are in Heavineſs, through manifold Temptations; well knowing the gracious Intention of our heavenly Father to be this, *that the Trial of our Faith may be found unto Praiſe, and Honour, and Glory, at the Appearing of Jeſus Chriſt*[s].

Let us therefore ſeriouſly and often recollect not only the monſtrous Ingratitude of repining, and the very blameable Unreaſonableneſs of Deſpondency, but the ſtrong Obligation of being as thankful for all Things, as the Infirmity of our Nature will permit. Indeed merely uſing pious Words of Thankfulneſs for Afflictions, inſincerely, without any correſpondent Senſe of what we utter, would be an Affectation, diſguſtful to Men, and provoking to God. But forming our Hearts, in the Degree that we are able, to the real Spirit of it, is one of the nobleſt Exerciſes of inward Devotion. As we are imperfect in every Duty, we ſhall in all Likelihood be more peculiarly imperfect in ſo exalted and difficult a one: and we ſhould not be dejected on finding that we are. But neither ſhould we ever ceaſe either praying or endeavouring to attain,

[s] 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

what is in Truth a valuable Part of the Temper of Heaven. When we come thither, we ſhall clearly perceive the Uſefulneſs of our moſt exquiſite Sufferings here, and praiſe God for them to Eternity; therefore let us be perſuaded of their Uſefulneſs in the mean Time, and begin to praiſe him for them now.

But theſe and all our Praiſes the Apoſtle directs us,

III. To offer up *in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.*

By him, as the Scripture expreſsly teaches, *God made the Worlds*[h]*: by him were all Things created, that are in Heaven and that are in Earth, viſible and inviſible: all Things were created by him and for him, and by him all Things conſiſt*[i]. Therefore in every Act of Worſhip, his Name is to be joined with that of the Father Almighty. By him have the various Diſpenſations of Providence been adminiſtered from the Beginning: and particularly that moſt important one of the Reſtoration of fallen and corrupted Man, *through the tender Mercy of our God*[k]*, who hath delivered us from the Power of Darkneſs, and hath tranſlated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son; in*

[h] Heb. i. 2. [i] Col. i. 16, 17. [k] Luke i. 78.

whom

whom we have Redemption through his Blood, even the Forgiveneſs of our Sins [l]. Therefore, all our Thankſgivings ought to commemorate the Source of all our Bleſſings. *Honour, and Glory, and Power, be unto him that ſitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. For thou waſt ſlain, and haſt redeemed us to God through thy Blood, out of every Kindred, and Tongue, and People, and Nation* [m]. By him alſo, was the Knowledge of their Duty and Hopes revealed to Mankind: by him *the Day-ſpring from on high viſited us to give Light to them that ſat in Darkneſs and in the Shadow of Death, and guide our Feet into the Way of Peace* [n]. Through *the Spirit of Chriſt, which was in them* [o], the Prophets of the Old Teſtament directed and cheered the earlier Ages: his own perſonal Inſtructions much more abundantly enlightened the Apoſtles: and the Succeſſion of Teachers, which he appointed, hath conveyed the glad Tidings of his Goſpel down to us, and will to the World's End. *Thanks be unto God for his unſpeakable Gift* [p].

Reaſoning had bewildered Men in Multi-

[l] Col. i. 13, 14. [m] Rev. v. 13, 9. [n] Luke i. 78, 79.
[o] 1 Pet. x. 11. [p] 2 Cor. ix, 15.

tudes

tudes of Errors, and led them into very little Truth. It could not lead them into any Certainty of thoſe Truths, which were of the greateſt Importance to Sinners: Pardon, Grace, and eternal Happineſs. It could not aſſure us of that comfortable Doctrine of the Text, that we have Cauſe to thank God for every Thing which befalls us. For how ſhould the wiſeſt of Men attain, by the mere Exerciſe of his own Faculties, to know, whether it be poſſible in the Nature of Things, and fit upon the Whole, for the Supreme Being to order all Events in ſuch a Manner, as that every one of them ſhall be for the Benefit of every good Perſon? We may wiſh this indeed; we may hope it; and it is the moſt glorious Hope, that we are capable of: but a Ground of firm Reliance can be only from the gracious Declarations of our bleſſed Lord, or his authorized Servants: and we are ſtrictly bound to aſk and receive this and every Bounty from above, as Believers in him. Juſtly then doth St. *Paul* direct us: *Whatſoever ye do, in Word or Deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jeſus, giving Thanks to God and the Father by him*[q]. And again: *In every Thing give Thanks: for this*

[q] Col. iii. 17.

is

this is the Will of God in Jesus Christ concerning you [r]. Suitably to which Precepts, St. *Peter* represents it as the great End of our whole Behaviour *that God may be glorified in all Things through Jesus Christ* [s]. *By him therefore*, as the Epistle to the *Hebrews* exhorts, *let us offer the Sacrifice of Praise to God continually, giving Thanks to his Name* [t]. His merciful Purpose in what he hath done for us, and what he hath taught us, is that we may be happy, not only hereafter but even here. *These Things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have Peace. In the World ye shall have Tribulation: but be of good Cheer; I have overcome the World* [u]. He underwent on our Account the most dreadful of all Afflictions, for this Reason amongst others, to *leave us an Example, that we should follow his Steps* [w], *and look unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith, that we may not be wearied and faint in our Minds* [x]; *but rejoice in as much as we are Partakers of Christ's Sufferings, that when his Glory shall be revealed, we may be glad with exceeding Joy* [y].

[r] 1 Thess. v. 18. [s] 1 Pet. iv. 11. [t] Heb. xiii. 15.
[u] John xvi. 33. [w] 1 Pet. ii. 21. [x] Heb. xii. 2, 3.
[y] 1 Pet. iv. 13.

And

And now, were but all, who profeſs Chriſtianity, careful to qualify themſelves for looking on the various Occurrences of Life, whether proſperous or adverſe, as Tokens of God's kind Purpoſes towards them for the Sake of his dear Son, and conſcientious in paying him ſincerely ſuitable Acknowledgements: how void would they be of Reſentment to each other; how full of Pity to ſuch as would injure them, knowing that they can only hurt themſelves: what a pleaſing Security againſt Fear and Diſappointment, what *ſtrong Conſolation* [z] under Sorrow and Pain, what a powerful Support under all the Decays of Body or Mind, would they enjoy: how delightful would be their Intercourſe with Heaven, conſiſting almoſt wholly in Acts of Gratitude and Praiſe: how bliſsful a Senſe of God's Love to them muſt they feel continually increaſing; and how irreſiſtible a Recommendation of *the Doctrine of God our Saviour* [a] muſt theſe admirable Fruits of it exhibit to all Mankind! Very different is the preſent State of Things. But to every one, who ſteadily practiſes this Duty, the Benefits of it are juſt the ſame, as if it were practiſed univerſally. All outward Mo-

[z] Heb. vi. 18. [a] Tit. ii. 10.

leſtations,

leſtations, inſtead of deſtroying his inward Peace, contribute, he knows, to promote his true Welfare. And though he is tenderly grieved for the Guilt, and the Miſery preſent and future, of the incorrigibly bad, while they applaud themſelves, and deſpiſe or hate him, yet his Concern is tempered with that placid Acquieſcence in the moſt awful Parts of God's Will, which the Redeemer, though *he wept over Jeruſalem*[b], felt when he ſaid: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that thou haſt hid theſe Things from the wiſe and prudent*, meaning in their own Imaginations, *and haſt revealed them unto Babes*, Perſons of an humble Simplicity of Heart: *Even ſo, Father, for ſo it ſeemed good in thy Sight*[c]. Yet, though cordially reconciled to every Thing which he ſees and expects, the good Chriſtian pleaſes himſelf peculiarly with the Proſpect of that promiſed Time, when on this Earth *all the People ſhall be righteous*[d]: but inexpreſſibly more with the Aſſurance of a bleſſed Eternity, in which all who are accounted worthy to partake ſhall at length magnify the Judge of the World, with unmixed Delight, for every

[b] Luke xix. 41. [c] Matth. xi. 25, 26. Luke x. 21.
[d] Iſ. lx. 21.

Thing

Thing they have ſuffered, as well as every Thing they have enjoyed; *and ſing the Song of Moſes the Servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb,* the final Reſult of all the divine Revelations, recorded from the firſt, *ſaying: Great and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty: juſt and true are thy Ways, thou King of Saints. Who ſhall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy Name? For thou only art holy,— thy Judgements are made manifeſt* [c].

[c] Rev. xv. 3, 4.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

PSALM cxxviii. 5, 6.

The Lord ſhall bleſs thee out of Zion, and thou ſhalt ſee the Good of Jeruſalem all the Days of thy Life.

Yea, thou ſhalt ſee thy Childrens Children, and Peace upon Iſrael.

THE Subject of this Pſalm is declared in the firſt Verſe. *Bleſſed is every one, that feareth the Lord, that walketh in his Ways.* For *Godlineſs is profitable unto all Things, having Promiſe of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come*[a]. The preſent Happineſs attending it was indeed ſomewhat more viſible, while there was more Need it ſhould, in thoſe earlier Times, when the future Rewards of it were leſs clearly diſcovered. But in every

[a] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

ſucceeding

ſucceeding Age alſo, the Practice of Religion and Virtue hath appeared, to all prudent Inquirers, the likelieſt and ſureſt Way to avoid the Miſeries of Life, and ſecure the Enjoyments of it. The firſt Advantage, which the Pſalmiſt promiſes to the pious, comprehends in general Health and Succeſs in their Affairs. *For thou ſhalt eat the Labour of thine Hands: happy ſhalt thou be, and it ſhall be well with thee.* The next is a particular Bleſſing of the neareſt Concern; the Poſſeſſion of domeſtic and conjugal Felicity, in the Midſt of a large and well ordered Family. *Thy Wife ſhall be as a fruitful Vine by the Sides of thine Houſe: thy Children like Olive Plants round about thy Table.* For ſuch Plants would ſoon afford both an agreeable Shelter to thoſe who feaſt under them in the open Air, as the Eaſtern Manner was, and a conſiderable Profit to the Owners of them. Delight, Security, and Plenty at Home, being uſually the principal Objects of Deſire, the Pſalmiſt lays an emphatical Streſs on them, by adding, *Behold, thus ſhall the Man be bleſſed, that feareth the Lord.* But ſtill, as good Perſons can never throughly reliſh their own private Welfare, if the Community ſuffers at the ſame Time, or Calamities are likely to befall

befall it ſoon, an Aſſurance is given them in the laſt Place, that their exemplary Obedience to the Laws of God will, through his Mercy, contribute to their being Witneſſes of the Proſperity, both of their Country and their Deſcendants during a long Courſe of Years: *The Lord ſhall bleſs thee out of Zion, and thou ſhalt ſee the Good of Jeruſalem all the Days of thy Life. Yea, thou ſhalt ſee thy Childrens Children, and Peace upon Iſrael:* in which concluding Part of this moſt pleaſing View even of the preſent Condition of religious and virtuous Perſons, we have it ſignified to us,

I. That a large Portion of their Happineſs conſiſts in the flouriſhing State of their Country.

II. That this Happineſs is greatly increaſed by a Proſpect, that their own Poſterity will continue to flouriſh with it.

III. That both theſe Things depend on, and are to be expected from, the divine Benediction.

I. That a large Portion of their Happineſs conſiſts in the flouriſhing State of their Country. Every Thing hath an Influence on our En-

joyments, in Proportion to the Share which it hath in our Affections. And Affection to the Public never fails to be remarkably ſtrong in worthy Breaſts. The complete Character indeed of ſocial Virtue, if conſidered in Theory, is good Will towards all Men. And no Concern for a Part deſerves Praiſe, if it be inconſiſtent with Benevolence to the Whole. But the Whole, even of this Earth, is an Object ſo vaſt, that few, if any, can preſerve in their Minds a fixed Regard to it, or entertain the ſmalleſt Hope of doing it Service. Therefore Mankind is advantageouſly divided into many particular Societies. And a Zeal in the Members of each for the Benefit of their own deſerves, not only to be encouraged as a moſt uſeful Quality, but honoured, as a moſt laudable one. It ſhews a Rightneſs and Greatneſs of Mind, capable of being affected by a common Intereſt: it ſhews the moſt amiable of Virtues, Love, towards a large Part of our Fellow-creatures, and implies Nothing contrary towards the reſt. For the real Good of every People in the World is compatible with the real Good of every other. To rule and to oppreſs is no Good to any: and Peace and Liberty and friendly Intercourſe for mutual Convenience

venience all the Nations of the Earth may enjoy at once. The Happineſs of Individuals, (we experience it) depends, not on riſing above others, but on being eaſy and well within themſelves, and reaſonably ſecure of continuing ſo. In like Manner the Happineſs of Kingdoms and States depends, not on extended Dominion or Superfluity of Wealth, (whence often proceeds every Kind of Evil) but on inward good Order and outward Safety. Theſe Things we may and muſt rejoice to ſee our Country poſſeſs: and theſe are the only Things, which the Love of it requires us to have at Heart.

This Virtue indeed, as well as others, hath been frequently miſunderſtood: and falſe Appearances of it unhappily purſued. Yet even then ſo much Rightneſs of Intention towards their own Community was mixed in the Minds of Men with wrong Behaviour towards the Nations round them, that their Injuſtice, though monſtrous, hath been always conſidered with Indulgence, nay often admired as Heroiſm. And the only People, too ſeverely cenſured on this Head, hath been the Jewiſh: whoſe very Law ſome have charged with teaching ill Will to the reſt of the World, though it hath

more Precepts of Compaſſion and Tenderneſs towards them, than perhaps any other. They were indeed commanded to ſet out with extirpating the *Canaanites*, and planting themſelves in their Land. But well might Heaven decree, after a Forbearance of ſeveral Ages, the Deſtruction of theſe Wretches, abandoned at once to the moſt unnatural Luſts, and the moſt ſhocking Barbarities; and (which made their Recovery hopeleſs) both of them practiſed, as Acts of their Religion. Nor could the Jews be more ſtrongly warned againſt committing ſuch Enormities, than by being appointed to puniſh them; as God may certainly puniſh, either by his own Hand, or by whom he will. But with all Mankind ever after, they were to live in Peace: only avoiding Intimacies likely to corrupt them, and extinguiſh that Profeſſion of Faith in the one true God, which they were deſigned to preſerve for the general Benefit. Accordingly they were, when free, as good Neighbours, and when conquered, as good Subjects, as other Men; till heathen Perſecution provoked them to hate even thoſe Heathens, who were no Perſecutors: and then it was Time for our Saviour to teach them, not the Love of their Country,

(for

(for of that, ſuch as it was, they had too much) but the univerſal Love of all Men: a Doctrine equally needful, though on different Accounts, for the *Romans* alſo. Yet he, and his great Apoſtle St. *Paul*, were ſhining Examples of moſt affectionate Concern for their Brethren of the Houſe of *Iſrael*, even while they received the cruelleſt Treatment from them. And, though the firſt Diſciples were chiefly private Perſons, under one abſolute Dominion, and that, of unbelieving Magiſtrates, and conſequently no other political Injunctions, than thoſe of dutiful Obedience and uniformly moral Behaviour, could with Propriety be laid upon them; yet theſe are inculcated with ſuch Diligence, and grounded on ſuch Principles in the New Teſtament, that as ample a Proviſion is made by them for the public Welfare as then was feaſible: and whoever will ſeriouſly conſider the Goſpel Rules, will be far from aſſerting, with a late Author [b], that the Love of his Country is a Virtue purely voluntary in a Chriſtian.

If the Love of all Men be required by our Religion, the Love of thoſe, whom we are moſt able to ſerve, muſt be underſtood as pe-

[b] Lord Shafteſbury.

culiarly required. If we are to feel for Strangers and Enemies, we cannot but feel more ſtrongly for thoſe, to whom Acquaintance and Neighbourhood, Relation and Friendſhip, common Laws and common Intereſts, unite us. It was never from the Extenſiveneſs of their Benevolence, but the Narrowneſs of it, that Men have made the Public ſuffer: and therefore the truer Chriſtian any one is, the truer Patriot he will ever be. And eſpecially if the Equity of the civil Conſtitution, under which he lives, remarkably ſecures whatever is valuable to Men at preſent; and the Purity of the Doctrines publicly taught, leads them the ſafeſt Way to eternal Bliſs hereafter; he will rejoice and be thankful from the Bottom of his Soul, that *the Lot is fallen unto him in* ſo *fair a Ground*[c]: where he can *ſing of Mercy and Judgement*[d], and *go with the Multitude to the Houſe of God, with the Voice of Joy and Praiſe*[e].

But, though every pious Perſon will always conſider the Happineſs of his Country, as a very intereſting Part of his own, yet the Degree in which he will conſider it ſo, muſt greatly depend on the Relation to it, in which

[c] Pſ. xvi. 6. [d] Pſ. ci. 1. [e] Pſ. xlii. 4.

he

he ſtands. And therefore they who are diſtinguiſhed by the more important Relations, whoſe Office and Buſineſs conſiſts in being *the Miniſters of God for Good*[f], to Numbers, to Nations of their Fellow-creatures at once, they muſt have exalted Satisfaction in ſeeing *the Pleaſure of the Lord proſper in their Hands*[g]. Every Inſtance of national Felicity muſt warm their Breaſts with ſingular Conſolation: above all, when they are conſcious of its ariſing from their own Rightneſs of Mind, and Vigilance of Conduct: when they know they have deſerved from the People under them that excellent Character of *David: He fed them with a faithful and true Heart, and ruled them prudently with all his Power*[h].

II. The next Thing to be learnt from the Text is, that the Happineſs, accruing to good Men from the flouriſhing State of their Country, is greatly increaſed by the Proſpect, that their own Poſterity will continue to flouriſh with it.

The Deſire of exerting our tendereſt Affections, which are the conjugal and parental, and leaving Repreſentatives of ourſelves behind

[f] Rom. xiii. 4. [g] Iſ. liii. 10. [h] Pſ. lxxviii. 73.

us, to preſerve our Name, inherit our Subſtance, and carry on the Deſigns of Providence on Earth, is deeply rooted in our Frame: it hath always influenced the Conduct of Men, in Proportion as they have lived agreeably to the Simplicity of Nature: and they who have thought the abſolute Reſtraint of this Inclination the Way to higher Degrees of Purity and ſpiritual Perfection, have entertained a Notion as evidently wrong, as the divine Conſtitution of Things is right. But though ſuch Imaginations are groundleſs, preclude the Exerciſe of many Virtues, and weaken human Society: yet the Indulgence of irregular Liberties, however favourably their own or common Practice may induce Perſons to think of them, produces Effects far more hurtful: overturns all good Order, deſtroys the Peace of Families, introduces endleſs Confuſions and Diſtreſſes, cauſes moſt afflicting Breaches of Faith, tempts to moſt execrable Barbarities, effaces gradually all moral Principles, and begets more Crimes and Sorrows, than almoſt any one Sin beſides. The ſacred Inſtitution of Marriage therefore is of the utmoſt Importance to the Innocence and the Happineſs of Mankind. They who avoid it, as engaging them in Cares

and

and Troubles, diſtruſt the Goodneſs of God, who hath made every Article of proper Behaviour, on the Whole, our preſent Intereſt: and they who diſcourage it, as many do grievouſly, though not profeſſedly, by running into needleſs Expences and Refinements, pervert, for the Sake of Vanities and Follies, the plain Way, which Heaven hath marked out for public Strength and private Comfort.

Marriage lays the Ground-work of all thoſe Kindreds and Affinities, which unite us together, by ſo many engaging Ties; and from which proceed ſuch numerous relative Duties, equally beneficial and delightful. Marriage allots to the ſeveral Members of the Society, diſtinct Parts of it for Objects of their peculiar Concern: and their Affection to theſe animates their Zeal for the Welfare of the Whole. Their Country ſeems nearer akin to them, for having Perſons, whom they love as themſelves, intereſted in what befalls it: they ſtudy its future Proſperity from their Attachment to thoſe whom they ſhall leave behind them; and triumph beforehand in the Proſpect of Happineſs to their Deſcendants, when they ſhall

ſhall be no more. Indolence and Selfiſhneſs would incline Men, ſtill much more powerfully than they do, to Behaviour of pernicious Conſequence on many Occaſions, were they influenced by perſonal Conſiderations only: but Regard to their Poſterity enlarges their Views, gives them a Sympathy with diſtant Times, and excites them to prefer without Heſitation and with Pleaſure, the laſting Benefit of others, though remote, to the greateſt and deareſt of their own ſhort-lived Advantages and Gratifications.

Now if a Likelihood, merely that their Offspring ſhall partake in the general Felicity, is able to fill the Minds of Men with ſuch Emotions; what tranſporting Reflections muſt they have, whoſe Deſcendants appear deſtined by the Stations of their Parents to be Authors of that Felicity in their Turn and Degree! How ſtrongly muſt ſuch a Hope induce them to ſecure by good Example and Inſtruction this higheſt Honour and Bleſſedneſs to ſuch as are to inherit their Dignities! And how warm a Return of moſt affectionate Gratitude will they merit and receive from Mankind, if Virtue and Liberty ſhall not only be ſupported

ported by them in the preſent Age, but tranſmitted to ſucceeding ones, by their pious Care of forming their Progeny to the Knowledge and the Love of public Good! The Proſpect only of *Childrens Children* would have little Joy in it, without that of *Peace upon Iſrael:* without a reaſonable Expectation of their contributing to the true Glory of the Family, from which they ſpring, and the true Happineſs of the Nation, over which they are to preſide. But when due Proviſion is made for this, both Sovereign and People may take up the Words of the Pſalmiſt: *Like as the Arrows in the Hand of the Giant, even ſo are the young Children. Happy is the Man that hath his Quiver full of them: they ſhall not be aſhamed, when they ſpeak with their Enemies in the Gate*[i].

But then, as ever we hope to ſee either our public or our private Happineſs continue, we muſt be careful to remember,

III. That both depend on the Divine Benediction.

Except the Lord build the Houſe, their Labour is but loſt that build it: except the Lord

[i] Pſ. cxxvii. 5, 6.

keep

keep the City, the Watchman waketh but in vain.—Children, and the Fruit of the Womb, are an Heritage and Gift that cometh of the Lord[k]. Theſe are the expreſs Declarations of holy Writ: and both Reaſon and Experience humbly ſubſcribe to them. It is not indeed poſſible for us in many Caſes to diſcern particularly in what Manner the Providence of God conducts Things: but we may plainly diſcern in general, that as the whole Courſe of Nature is nothing elſe than the free Appointment, which he hath been pleaſed to make; as the Motions of the inanimate World proceed from thoſe which he originally impreſſed upon it; and all the Thoughts and Actions of intelligent Beings are doubtleſs abſolutely ſubject to the Influence of their Maker; (ſince we ſee they are greatly ſubject, and often when they perceive it not, to that of their Fellow-creatures;) it muſt be in his Power by various Ways, perhaps the more effectual for being unknown, to diſpoſe of every Thing ſo, as may beſt anſwer his wiſe Purpoſes of Mercy or Correction. And as he evidently can do this, it is likewiſe evidently worthy of him to

[k] Pſ. cxxvii. 1, 2, 4.

do

do it; for the higheſt of his Titles is that of the moral Governor of the Univerſe: and therefore, we may firmly believe the Scripture aſſuring us, that he doth it in Fact; that he makes *all Things work together for Good to them that love him*[l], and *curſes the* very *Bleſſings*[m] of thoſe who love him not.

Whenever then we find our Affairs going on to our Content, our Families flouriſhing, our Healths conſtant, our Hearts full of Exultation, and dictating Language to us like that of *David*, *In my Proſperity I ſaid, I ſhall never be removed*; let us be ſure alſo like him to add, *Thou, Lord, of thy Goodneſs hadſt made my Hill ſo ſtrong*[n]. In the Hand of God it is, whether we ſhall have the Things that we wiſh for; whether, when we have them, they ſhall prove Comforts or Afflictions, the Joy or the Grief of our Souls; whether laſtly, if they are ever ſo dear to us, they ſhall remain with us, or be ſnatched from us: and therefore, it unſpeakably concerns us all to intereſt Providence in our Behalf. They whom God favours moſt, are by no Means exempt from Sufferings: but he not only will always make religious Perſons full Amends hereafter, but

[l] Rom. viii. 28. [m] Mal. ii. 2. [n] Pſ. xxx. 6.

ordinarily grant them Deliverance and Conſolation here. Thus the Pſalmiſt, immediately after his above-mentioned Triumph, had Cauſe to ſubjoin, *Thou didſt turn thy Face from me, and I was troubled*[o]. But it follows, *Then cried I unto thee, and gat me to my Lord right humbly*[p]. *Thou turnedſt my Heavineſs into Joy: thou haſt put off my Sackcloth, and girded me with Gladneſs*[q]. Nor was this a ſingular Mercy to him, or confined to the more worldly Jewiſh Diſpenſation: but our bleſſed Redeemer hath given a general Promiſe to his Diſciples, that they, who *ſeek firſt the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs*, ſhall have *all Things* needful *added unto them*[r]; and *ſhall*, even when moleſted *with Perſecutions, receive now in this Time an hundred Fold* of what they undergo, as well as *in the World to come eternal Life*[s].

Perſecutions indeed, more or leſs, the Apoſtle hath told us, *all ſhall ſuffer, that will live godly in Chriſt*[t]: and partly on that very Account. But in theſe, they ſhall be enabled *to take Pleaſure*[u], even when they are the heavieſt:

[o] Ver. 7. [p] Ver. 8. [q] Ver. 12.
[r] Matth. vi. 33. [s] Mark x. 30. [t] 2 Tim. iii. 12.
[u] 2 Cor. xii. 10.

and

and uſually they are very light, compared with the Calamities, which the wicked bring on their own Heads. The natural Tendency of Chriſtian Virtues is to Happineſs; of Sin, to Miſery: God hath appointed this Tendency, and he will make it effectual. If Nations, in the Midſt of their Wealth and Tranquillity, will not ſhew they are ſenſible, that he beſtows them, he will juſtly prove it by taking them away. And if thoſe Perſons, whom he hath raiſed to ſuperior Honours, and favoured with Marks of diſtinguiſhed Goodneſs, will ungratefully forget, by whoſe Power and for whoſe Service they were thus exalted and bleſſed, he can eaſily make them know by unexpected Judgements, *that the moſt High ruleth in the Kingdom of Men* [w], *and doth according to his Will in the Armies of Heaven, and amongſt the Inhabitants of the Earth.* But Princes and their People, joining together in thankful Obedience to the Laws of their great Benefactor, will be happy in themſelves and each other, will *ſhine as Lights in the World* [x]; and, to ſpeak in the Language of the Prophet, *upon all their Glory there ſhall be a Defence* [y].

[w] Dan. iv. 25. [x] Phil. ii. 15. [y] Iſ. iv. 5.

For

For God will ſave Sion, and build the Cities of Judah.—The Poſterity alſo of his Servants ſhall inherit it; and they, that love his Name, ſhall dwell therein [z]. *Their Children ſhall continue, and their Seed be eſtabliſhed before him* [a].

[z] Pſ. lxix. 36, 37. [a] Pſ. cii. 28.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

MATTH. vi. 16.

Moreover, when ye faſt, be not as the Hypocrites.

THE Practice of Faſting from a Principle of Religion has been thought of by different Perſons in ſo very different a Manner; ſome placing it amongſt the higheſt Duties, whilſt others account it mere Superſtition: and a great Part of thoſe, who obſerve it the moſt rigidly, are ſo little improved by it in true Goodneſs: that, I hope, diſcourſing on this Subject may be uſeful in general, as well as particularly ſeaſonable at preſent, to direct your Judgement and Behaviour in Relation to it. And therefore, I have choſen to treat of it from Words of the greateſt Authority; thoſe of our bleſſed Saviour: which contain,

I. A Suppoſition, that religious Faſting would be uſed amongſt his Followers: *When ye faſt.*

II. A Caution againſt uſing it amiſs: *Be not as the Hypocrites.*

I. A Suppoſition, that religious Faſting would be uſed amongſt his Followers: which indeed he muſt ſuppoſe of Courſe, unleſs he forbad it; becauſe the Cuſtom had very long been, and was then, univerſal in the World. Not only the People of the great City and Empire of *Nineveh*, as we read in Scripture, but the *Egyptians*, *Greeks*, *Romans*, almoſt all Nations, of whoſe Religion we have any particular Accounts, appear to have been led, either by Nature or antient Tradition, to abſtain from their Food, on certain Occaſions, as an Exerciſe of Piety. The Jewiſh Law could not be the Original of an Obſervance, that had ſpread ſo wide: eſpecially, as that Law appoints but one ſingle Day in the whole Year to be kept as a public Faſt, and gives no Orders for private Faſting at all. Yet we find, from the early Times of their Commonwealth downwards, many other public Faſts obſerved by them, as Exigencies required: we find the Prophets approving and enjoining them,

them, and directing how they are to be ſolemnized: we find the moſt exemplary in Goodneſs amongſt them taking this Way of humbling themſelves before God in Secret, not only on perſonal and domeſtic, but national Accounts, and graciouſly accepted in ſo doing.

The ſame Uſage continued to our Saviour's Days. For we read in St. *Luke* [a], of *Anna* the Propheteſs, that *ſhe ſerved God with Faſtings and Prayers Night and Day.* Indeed by this Time, over and above ſeveral yearly Faſts, appointed by Authority [b], the ſtricter Sort obſerved two every Week voluntarily [c]. And not only the Phariſees, but *John*'s Diſciples alſo, faſted often [d]. Nor doth our bleſſed Lord condemn any Part of theſe Things: but, leaving the Frequency of Faſting to public and private Prudence, regulates only the Manner of it; and, by ſo doing, plainly treats it as a Practice, intended for perpetual Uſe. It is true, he doth not, in ſo many Words, *command* his Diſciples to faſt: he only ſaith, *When ye faſt.* But ſo he had ſaid juſt before, *when thou doſt thine Alms* [e], *when thou prayeſt* [f].

[a] Luke ii. 37. [b] Zach. viii. 19. [c] Luke xviii. 12.
[d] Matth. ix. 14. [e] Verſe 2. [f] Verſe 6.

Yet these are certainly Duties of Christianity. And had he not designed, that Fasting should be considered in some Degree as a Duty also; he would never have promised a Reward to the right Performance of it, as he doth in the next Verse, but one, after the Text. And besides, he not only fasted himself, in a Manner quite beyond our Imitation, but declared, that though then his Disciples did not fast, yet after *he was taken from them, they should*[g]: which they verified accordingly. *Cornelius* indeed was not yet a Christian, when he fasted to the ninth Hour[h]: but that was amongst the Means of his becoming one. We read in the following Chapters of the *Acts*, that Congregations, under the Guidance of Prophets and Apostles, fasted on more Occasions than one[i]. St. *Paul* enjoins private Persons to *give themselves* at Times *to Fasting and Prayer*[k]. The whole Christian Church, from the Beginning, hath both esteemed and practised it not a little: and to this Day both the Ecclesiastical and Civil Powers continue to prescribe it.

If then we have any Regard to the Example and Experience of good Persons, to

[g] Matth. ix. 15. [h] Acts x. 30. [i] Acts xiii. 2, 3. xiv. 23.
[k] 1 Cor. vii. 5.

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the Injunctions and Commands of our earthly Superiors, or to the Authority of Scripture itſelf; we cannot think Faſting an Obſervance to be either blamed or ſlighted. But for yet fuller Satisfaction, and indeed for our Direction alſo, let us inquire more particularly, what its Meaning and Uſes are.

One very uſeful Meaning is, to expreſs our Sorrow for having offended God, and our Senſe of not deſerving the leaſt of his Favours. By ſome it hath been thought, that our firſt Parents introduced it, as a penitential Memorial of their eating the forbidden Fruit: which indeed it might very properly expreſs. But without inſiſting on this, for which we have no Warrant, Abſtaining for ſome Time from our daily Food ſignifies, moſt naturally, that we are unworthy of it; and can take no Comfort in it, whilſt we are under the divine Diſpleaſure. And as anciently, every Thing of Importance was denoted, eſpecially in the Eaſtern Countries, by Actions as well as Words; this was probably the original Purpoſe, for which Men uſed Faſting. And it was then ſometimes extended to Children, and Cattle; in Token, that the Parents and

Owners of them had forfeited the deareſt Bleſſings, and moſt valuable Conveniences of Life[k]. It is true, a proper Confeſſion in Words would have expreſſed the ſame Thing, that this Ceremony doth, and ſomewhat more clearly, unleſs it were explained by Words. But in all Likelihood it uſually was: or if not, the Difficulty of underſtanding it cannot be accounted great. And where it is appointed by Authority, or prevails by Cuſtom, as the eſtabliſhed Method of ſignifying Humiliation, we are as much bound to comply with it, as with any other Appointment or Cuſtom; and ſhould be as juſtly thought diſobedient or unſociable, if we refuſed: even though it had no peculiar Advantages to compenſate for its being of leſs obvious Meaning: whereas indeed it hath conſiderable ones. For Words alone are far from carrying with them that Energy and Influence upon the Mind, which the ſuperadded Solemnity of ſuch an Abſtinence muſt, even in private Caſes; and much more, when whole Aſſemblies, and Cities, and Countries, join in it. But above all, when either Perſons or Nations have been remarkably wicked, ſuch moving and afflicting Acknowledgements of

[k] Joel ii. 16. Jonah iii. 7, 8. Judith iv. 10.

it

it are ſingularly adapted to produce more powerful and laſting Impreſſions on thoſe, who make uſe of them; and by that Means to render them fitter Objects of divine Mercy. Indeed, were every Method, which the warmer Imaginations of the Eaſtern People ſuggeſted formerly, and found really conducive to this End, practiſed now among ſuch, as are leſs accuſtomed and diſpoſed to ſignificative Actions, conſiderable Inconveniences might follow: and in Fact, multiplying ritual Obſervances hath contributed almoſt every where to darken Religion, and corrupt it. But ſo ſimple and intelligible an Uſage, as mere Faſting, may ſurely be employed, in any Age and Place, without Danger.

And, beſides the good Effects it may have, as a ſtrong outward Mark of Repentance, it may be a Cauſe, by its phyſical Effects, of our feeling greater Degrees of inward Conviction. The Faculties of many Perſons are overloaded by continual Exceſs, and *the corruptible Body preſſeth down the Soul*[1]: nor can it exert itſelf, till the Burthen upon it is lightened. And without what is commonly

[1] Wiſd. ix. 15.

called Exceſs, a conſtant Courſe of high or full Living hath ſo powerful a Tendency to immerſe our Thoughts in worldly Objects, and make us, both indolent as to our eternal Intereſts, and fearleſs of the Conſequences of ſuch Indolence: that all, who paſs their Days in the free Enjoyment of Plenty, have Need frequently to interrupt their Indulgences, however lawful in their Nature: to admoniſh themſelves, by ſo doing, that they have much more important Concerns, than the Gratification of Senſe and Eaſe: and to view the State of their Souls with attentive Thoughtfulneſs; which Abſtinence, and its proper Companion Retirement, would beget. Aſſuredly Numbers of them would then ſee their Condition in Reſpect of God, and a future Life, in a very different Light, from that, which warm Blood, gay Spirits, and preſumptuous Imaginations place it in. And for Want of ſuch Views it is, that ſo many are groſsly wicked, and ſo many more very imperfectly and inſufficiently good; whom a Habit of conſiderate Self-reſtraint would render by Degrees indifferent to earthly Enjoyments, and ſollicitous for thoſe of a better World. Nay, even ſingle Acts of

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ſuch Reſtraint will uſually, for the Time, lower our Paſſions into ſome good Meaſure of Compoſedneſs, and make our Sorrow for Sin humbler and deeper: on both which Accounts Faſting is called in Scripture, *afflicting the Soul*[m]. For it mortifies the Deſires of the ſenſitive Part, and enlivens the Remorſe of the rational. By theſe Means, it may contribute much to render our Faith of inviſible Things more lively, and our Devotions more fervent: for which Reaſon Faſting is always underſtood in Scripture, and always ought in Practice, to be accompanied by Prayer. And in Proportion as it qualifies us to pray as we ought, it aſſures us of obtaining our Requeſts; whether they be for averting God's Judgements, or deriving his Mercies upon us, in our public Capacity or private.

But farther yet, Faſting not only aſſiſts Humiliation and Devotion, but is in other Ways alſo friendly to Virtue. Inflicting it on ourſelves as a Penalty, when we have been guilty of any great Sin, will contribute greatly, and yet with perfect Safety, if it be done with Diſcretion, to our becoming weary and afraid of ſinning. Accordingly St. *Paul* ſpeaks of

[m] Iſ. lviii. 3, 5.

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Self-puniſhment, as a very uſeful and beneficial Fruit of true Repentance. *For behold, your ſorrowing after a godly Sort, what Carefulneſs it wrought in you; yea, what Zeal; yea, what Revenge*[n]. But eſpecially, if we have been ſeduced into unlawful Pleaſures of Senſe, or even are in Danger of it only, Faſting is peculiarly medicinal: withdraws the Fewel from irregular Deſires; proves to us by Experience, and ſtrengthens by Uſe, our Ability of bridling our natural Appetities; and ſo prevents our undoing ourſelves, by truſting vainly to the Plea of human Infirmity, as an Excuſe for deliberate Tranſgreſſion, or ſupine Negligence. Exerciſes of moderate Hardſhip add a Vigour to the Mind: and were on that Account recommended even by heathen Moraliſts[o], as teaching Contempt of low Gratifications, and of the Wealth that miniſters to them; of the Blandiſhments of Luxury, and the falſe Elegance of effeminate Politeneſs. But far ſtronger Inducements have we Chriſtians to take the moſt effectual Methods for exalting our Souls above theſe Things: as we know, to a much higher Degree of Certainty, that *the carnal Mind is Enmity againſt*

[n] 2 Cor. vii. 11. [o] Arr. Epict. l. 3. c. 12. and c. 14.

God[p]; that they, who *live in Pleaſure, are dead whilſt they live*[q]; and that by detaching our Affections properly from Things on Earth, we ſhall attain the Bleſſedneſs of Heaven[r].

Nor will Faſting contribute only to mortify our Fondneſs for ſenſual Indulgences; but alſo to abate the Impetuoſity of vehement Spirits; and that *Pride of Heart*, which the Prophet *Ezekiel*, in the Caſe of *Sodom* and *Jeruſalem*, connects with *Fulneſs of Bread*[s]. We often find the ſame Perſons, when pampered into luxuriant Health, overbearing, impatient of Contradiction, outrageous in Anger, who, when voluntary or neceſſary Abſtinence hath reduced them to a calmer State of Mind, are conſiderate, reaſonable, and humane. But particularly it inſpires Humanity and Compaſſion to the Poor. For it gives us Experience, from Time to Time, of what they are often forced to feel: and not only reminds all Perſons, but better enables thoſe of middling Circumſtances, by leſſening now and then their Expences on themſelves, to relieve the Wants of their indigent Brethren: for which Rea-

[p] Rom. viii. 7. [q] 1 Tim. v. 6. [r] Col. iii. 1. &c.
[s] Ezek. xvi. 49.

ſon

ſon the Prophet *Iſaiah* ſuppoſes it attended by doing every Act of Equity and Mercy, but eſpecially giving of Alms; and introduces God himſelf ſaying: *Is not this the Faſt, that I have choſen? to looſe the Bands of Wickedneſs, to undo the heavy Burthens, to let the oppreſſed go free, and that ye break every Yoke? Is it not to deal thy Bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the Poor, that are caſt out, to thy Houſe; when thou ſeeſt the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyſelf from thine own Fleſh*[t]?

Theſe are ſome of the ſpiritual Benefits, for I omit to mention the corporeal ones, though very conſiderable, which recommend Faſting. And ſurely they are at leaſt ſufficient to keep every Pretender to Seriouſneſs from deriding it, or thinking meanly of ſuch as practiſe it. Though any one may judge, or find, it ever ſo uſeleſs to himſelf; yet he cannot well know what it may be to others. And therefore, the Rule of Scripture is in this Senſe perfectly juſt: *Let not him, that eateth, deſpiſe him, that eateth not*[u]. If he doth, his Contempt may

[t] Iſ. lviii. 6, 7. Hence *Hermas* directs, lib. 3. *Sim.* 5. that the Money ſaved by Faſting be given to the Poor.
[u] Rom. xiv. 3.

light on Characters of the higheſt Eminence in Wiſdom and Goodneſs; as it happened in the Caſe of the Royal Pſalmiſt: *The Reproaches of them, that reproached thee, are fallen upon me. I wept, and chaſtened my Soul with Faſting; and that was turned to my Reproof*[x].

But as we ought, by all the Prudence we can, to ſpare others the Guilt, and ourſelves the Uneaſineſs and Provocation, of ſuch unkind Treatment: ſo we ſhould be yet more careful not to deſerve it in any Degree: and ſhould therefore take diligent Notice, that the Text contains,

II. A Caution againſt uſing this Practice amiſs. Our Saviour indeed prohibits expreſsly no other Abuſes, than ſuch as Hypocrites committed: and mentions, of thoſe, only one in particular. But as he certainly meant that, merely for a Specimen of many; and deſigned, that all ſhould be avoided; it will be uſeful to ſet before you others alſo, moſt of which are condemned expreſsly ſomewhere in the Word of God: and all implicitly here.

Faſting is a Duty, not for its own Sake:

[x] Pſ. lxix. 9, 10.

for

for neither *Meat*, nor abſtaining from Meat, *commendeth us to God*[y]: but for the Sake of its good Effects. Proportionably therefore, as in any Perſon's Caſe it is found, on impartial and full Trial, to fail of thoſe Effects, or to produce bad ones, which outweigh or equal them, it ceaſes to be a Duty; any farther than the Obligation of ſetting no hurtful Example, and giving no Offence, may juſtly demand Regard. And as the Caſes of different Perſons differ extremely, it is either wicked Tyranny, or pitiable Unſkilfulneſs, to enjoin, as the Church of *Rome* doth, all Perſons to abſtain, ſo often, and for ſo long together, from eating Fleſh; and all Perſons of ſuch an Age, and ſuch a State of Life and Health, to eat only once in a Day, or little more, of what they are ſuffered to eat. Preſcribing ſuch Rules, as theſe, to the whole World, muſt bring Hardſhips and Diſtreſſes on Millions of Perſons, eſpecially the Poor, from which they can receive no Good, but may ſuffer much Harm. It will give them wrong Notions of Religion, as conſiſting principally in outward Obſervances; and multiply griev-

[y] 1 Cor. viii. 8.

ouſly

ouſly the Temptations to Sin, by adding imaginary Duties, that will often be more difficult than the real ones. They allow indeed ſome occaſional Exceptions from theſe general Rules: and yet, even did they alſo allow Perſons to judge for themſelves, when their Circumſtances came within thoſe Exceptions, it would ſtill be a Source of endleſs Doubts and Scruples to timorous Minds. But beſides the Uncertainty, whether they may in Conſcience deſire to be excepted, they are ſubjected to the Will and Pleaſure of others, whether that Deſire ſhall be granted; and to a large Expence for it, if it be: And theſe and other Diſpenſations are one Fund of Wealth to the Clergy and Court of *Rome*, which they have uſed to the vileſt Purpoſes. No Part of all this is founded on Scripture: nor even on the Practice of the primitive Church; which for ſome Ages laid no Neceſſity on any one of Faſting at ſuch particular annual Seaſons; much leſs of Faſting for many Days and Weeks together; and when they did faſt, made no Diſtinction between the Uſe of Fleſh and Fiſh; but left every one the Liberty, which Chriſt and his Apoſtles had left them: as indeed our own Church

hath

hath done too. For though it hath mentioned certain Times of Abſtinence, which it might have been unſafe not to mention at the Time of the Reformation: yet this, being backed by no new Injunction, amounts only to recommending them, ſo far as each Perſon ſhall find no real Objection againſt them. And certainly moſt, if not all Perſons, would find, on the contrary, much Benefit from leſſening even their lawful Indulgences of Senſe at proper Seaſons, and the preſent Seaſon in particular. But in order to our judging rightly, in what Degree this will be expedient for us, divers Things ought to be conſidered. Not many indeed of our Church, in the preſent Age, run at all into exceſſive Auſterities: very far from it, God knows. But if any do, they ought to be warned: and though none did here, the Chriſtian Doctrine ought to be vindicated from the Imputation of leading to ſuch Extremes any where.

Some obſerve conſtantly a Diet ſufficiently low; ſome few perhaps, too low. Now for theſe, who live in a State of daily Faſting, to ſuperadd other Faſts, eſpecially frequent and rigid ones, may be prejudicial, not only to their Healths, of which they are bound to

be

be careful, but to their moral Diſpoſitions, and their very Underſtandings. It may render them leſs, inſtead of more capable of ſerious Reflection and religious Exerciſes: it may unfit them to go through their proper Buſineſs in common Life: it may incline them ſtrongly to Moroſeneſs of Temper. And though the Ill-humour, into which People wilfully work themſelves upon faſting Days, is to be aſcribed to themſelves only: yet ſo much of it, as Abſtinence really brings upon them againſt their Wills, is to be aſcribed to that; and is no ſmall Evil. But farther yet: low-ſpirited and ſcrupulous Perſons may, for Want of ſupporting their Strength of Body, on which the Firmneſs of the Mind in Part depends, by a ſufficient Quantity of Food, increaſe their Fears and Perplexities moſt ſurpriſingly: till at Length there will ſcarce remain a ſingle Action, that they can do or abſtain from with a quiet Conſcience. And, at the ſame Time, on the other Hand, Perſons of warm and enthuſiaſtic Imaginations are heated by long and ſtrict Faſts beyond any Thing: till they feel Impulſes, hear Voices, ſee Viſions; forget the World to which they belong, and live in a new one of their own Creation. Now ac-

cording to the Degree, in which there is Danger of any ſuch Inconveniences, we ought either to avoid intirely what cauſes them, or obſerve a due Moderation in it: elſe our Abſtinence may eaſily do us much more Hurt, than Service.

And another important Rule is, never to make Vows, or even Reſolutions that we will faſt ſo often, with ſuch or ſuch Rigour, for any particular Time to come, eſpecially to any diſtant Time. For it ſeldom or never happens, that ſuch Things are of real Advantage. And they have ſo frequently been Snares and Diſtreſſes, that all Perſons ought to be warned againſt them: and they, who are moſt prone to them, ought to be moſt afraid of them.

But ſuppoſing we are, by Nature, ever ſo well qualified to receive Benefit from the Practice of this Duty: yet none will follow, unleſs we guard againſt Miſtakes.

Faſting conſiſts in abſtaining, wholly or in Part, from our ordinary Food. Abſtaining wholly the former Part of the Day is undoubtedly the natural, and ſhould be the general Method of doing this. But they, in whoſe Caſe good Reaſons forbid it, may, by properly reſtraining themſelves in the latter

Part, keep their Faſt to all good Purpoſes, after they have, in common Speech, broken it. Continuing a total Abſtinence longer than a Day can hardly ever be, and ſo long ſeldom is, either uſeful or ſafe. And though a conſiderable Approach towards total Abſtinence for the whole Day, if conducted prudently, may be allowed at proper Intervals for ſome ſmall Time, when deſigned for Self-puniſhment in great Faults; as indeed leſſening our Faſt into a Trifle, on any Occaſion, public or private, would be mocking God, cheating ourſelves, and giving Scandal or bad Example to others [z]: yet when ſubduing irregular Appetites and Paſſions is the End in View, moderate Severity, and barely, if at all, exceeding the Strictneſs of an exact and rigorous Temperance, but long continued, will be moſt effectual.

Abſtaining from particular Sorts of Food, from Fleſh-meat for Inſtance, as the ſtrongeſt and moſt pleaſing Sort, if it be not hurtful, is very proper; and on public Faſts eſpecially, as being the common and moſt viſible Mark of Compliance with what public Authority

[z] And therefore *Hermas*, ubi ſupra, directs, that on faſting Days nothing be taken, beſides Bread and Water.

enjoins. But ſtill this Abſtinence, beſides that laying a great Streſs upon it leads to Superſtition, or at leaſt affords it Countenance, may, to ſome Perſons, be no Self-denial at all, but conſiſtent with the moſt luxurious Indulgence. There are many, to whom ſeveral Sorts of Fiſh are more delicious, than Land-Animals; and perhaps full as nutritive. Nay, Methods have been invented, by which the Palate is hardly ever ſo much pleaſed, as when it is pretended to be mortified. The true Direction then concerning the Fare of our faſting Seaſons, is that, which the Example of the Prophet *Daniel* furniſhes: *In thoſe Days I ate no pleaſant Bread*[a]: that is, Nothing contrived to gratify or provoke the Appetite, but the plaineſt of wholeſome Diet. That we ought to be full as abſtemious in what we drink, as what we eat, is very clear; and both are put on a Level in the ſame Paſſage of *Daniel*: *Neither came Fleſh nor Wine in my Mouth*. The Scripture alſo condemns every other needleſs Indulgence at ſuch Times. *Wherefore have we faſted, ſay they, and thou ſeeſt not? Behold, in*

[a] Dan. x. 3. One moderate Meal, of Fleſh or Fiſh, without Delicacy, was appointed by Queen Eliz. on an occaſional Faſt. Strype's Life of Parker, p. 131—134.

the Day of your Faſt, ye find Pleaſure[b]. Nor can there be a Doubt, but Intemperance, or even Exceſs of Gaiety, either deſignedly preceding a Faſt, as is common in the *Romiſh* Carnaval, or following one, as I fear may ſometimes be the Caſe in other Churches, intirely deſtroys the religious Uſe of it.

But though we obſerve, in the righteſt Manner, every Thing that relates to the outward Act: yet *bodily Exerciſe*, of this or any other Kind, *profiteth little*[c], unleſs it be performed with good and proper Diſpoſitions of Soul. When the *Jews*, in *Iſaiah*'s Time, faſted *for Strife and Debate*, to ſerve the Purpoſes of Animoſity and Contention; far from being an Act of Piety, it was only *ſmiting with the Fiſt of Wickedneſs*[d]. When the Hypocrites, in our Saviour's Time, made, by their mournful Looks, a public Oſtentation of their private Abſtinence, he told them plainly, as the Words immediately following the Text inform us, that being ſeen and admired of Men ſhould be their only Reward, and directed his Diſciples to conceal, as far as conveniently might be, not their Obedience to Authority when it enjoins Days of Humiliation, though doubtleſs it

[b] If. lviii. 3. [c] 1 Tim. iv. 8. [d] If. lviii. 4.

ſhould be obeyed without Affectation or unneceſſary Singularity, but their voluntary Self-denials of this Kind: *that thou appear not unto Men to faſt; but unto thy Father, which ſeeth in Secret.* When the vainglorious Phariſee faſted twice a Week, and deſpiſed the poor Publican [e], he had infinitely better never have faſted once in his Life, and been humble in his Heart. Faſting is in general a Remedy, or needful Precaution: therefore whoever takes it, confeſſes, by ſo doing, either a Diſeaſe or a peculiar Liableneſs to one [f], of which Nobody ſure hath Ground to boaſt; and making our Humiliation a Matter of Pride is turning our Medicine into a Poiſon. Yet, of the two, condemning others is ſtill worſe, than being vain of ourſelves. *Let not him* therefore, *which eateth not, judge him that eateth,* for very poſſibly *God hath received* and accepted *him* [g]; but remember, that both the Apoſtles, and our Saviour himſelf, were unjuſtly cenſured by the Jews on this very Account [h]. The Perſons, whom you blame for not faſting, may faſt, in Effect at leaſt, more than you know

[e] Luke xviii. 11, 12. [f] Taylor, Holy Living, c. 4. § 5. N° 9. [g] Rom. xiv. 3. [h] Matth. ix. 14. xi. 19.

of;

of; or may have little or no Need of it, and be poſſeſſed, without it, of all the Good, that was deſigned to be attained by it. For it is but an Inſtrument: and whether the Work be chiefly done by this Inſtrument or that, provided it be well done, is not material: and, if it remain undone, having uſed the Inſtrument ever ſo much will intitle us to no Reward. Faſting, as managed by ſome, is or appears to be extremely difficult: and hence they are apt to think, that Heaven is much indebted to them for it: whereas perhaps they are much in Fault for making it ſo difficult: or, if they are not, at beſt they have done only their Duty, and ſo are unprofitable Servants[1]. Even the trueſt and the greateſt Virtues cannot deſerve the Pardon of our paſt Iniquities, and the Recompence of future Happineſs; but only qualify us to receive them from God's Mercy, granted for the Sake of our bleſſed Redeemer: much leſs then can bodily Auſterities, which are only Means of Virtue, do either of theſe Things. But, leaſt of all, will they be able to do it for thoſe, who, on the ſuppoſed Merit of them, venture on ſuch

[1] Luke xvii. 10.

Tranſgreſſions as they like, and ſo make *Chriſt the Miniſter of Sin* [k].

Deluding ourſelves by ſuch Contrivances, and attempting to impoſe upon God the Performance of ſome ſmall Part of what he requires, inſtead of the Whole, is as real, and more abſurd and fatal Hypocriſy, than endeavouring to deceive our Fellow-creatures. It therefore comes directly under the Prohibition of the Text: and we have peculiar Need to be on our Guard againſt it at preſent. Of late Years we have obſerved public Faſts with more Strictneſs and Devotion, than had been ſeen amongſt us in the Memory of Man. And ſo far all was well. But have we been afterwards uniformly pious and virtuous, watchful againſt all Sin, and Occaſions of Sin, attentive to our ſpiritual State and the great Concerns of Eternity? Or have we thought, that crowding the Churches for a Day, and abſtaining from a Folly or two for a Winter, perhaps with an ill Will, was Religion enough to ſave the Nation and our Souls? If any Thing like ſuch Imaginations have taken hold of us, we have adulterated and debaſed a powerful Re-

[k] Gal. ii. 17.

medy

medy into an uſeleſs and miſchievous Palliative, and while we truſt to it, are farther from the Hope of a radical Cure than ever. And were we to amend more throughly but for a ſhort Time only, our Caſe will be very little better. *O Ephraim, what ſhall I do unto thee? O Judah, what ſhall I do unto thee? For your Goodneſs is as a Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew it goeth away* [1]. Let us therefore, now and at all Times, conſcientiouſly beware of this, and every Error, in Reſpect of religious Mortifications. Let us neither ſuperſtitiouſly over-value, nor profanely deſpiſe, Inſtitutions for that Purpoſe: neither treat ourſelves with unprofitable Harſhneſs, nor with hurtful Indulgence: neither be influenced by ſervile Dread, nor by irreverent Preſumption: neither ſubmit our Conſciences to the Commands of Men, as if they were Doctrines of God; nor contemptuouſly reject proper Helps for obeying the Laws of God, as worthleſs Inventions of Men: neither exalt the Means into the ſame Rank with the End, nor hope to arrive at the End without the Means. Let us, after the Example of the holy Apoſtle, *ſo run, as not uncertainly; ſo fight, as not beating the Air:* but, with

[1] Hoſ. vi. 4.

ſtrict

ſtrict and yet prudent Diſcipline, *keep under the Body, and bring it into Subjection* [m]. *For every Man, that ſtriveth for the Maſtery, is temperate in all Things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible Crown, but we an incorruptible* [n]. Which that we may all obtain, &c.

[m] 1 Cor. ix. 26, 27. [n] Ibid. Ver. 25.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

PROV. xxii. 1.

A good Name is rather to be choſen, than great Riches.

IT ſeems very natural to wiſh, that amidſt the great Variety of Things, which on various Accounts appear deſirable in this World, we could paſs a right Judgement concerning the proportionable Value of each: that ſo we might determine, what Share of our Attention they ſeverally merit; and, when they interfere, which ought to have the Preference. Yet this we find to be, in moſt Caſes, far beyond our Skill. Whether Power, or Wealth, or Eaſe, an active or a contemplative Life, a private Station or a public, this Profeſſion and Employment or that, be more eligible; always hath been diſputed, and always will.

For

For the Deciſion will depend on Circumſtances too numerous and too uncertain to be conſidered with Exactneſs. And indeed it is for the Intereſt of Mankind, that the Anſwers to Queſtions of this Sort ſhould be involved in Obſcurity. For, ſuppoſe we all knew how to chuſe, yet we could not all have our Choice. And, as the Whole muſt conſiſt of very different Parts; it is well that our not knowing, which Condition would be the beſt for us, contributes to our receiving, as we are bound, whatever falls to our Lot, with a chearful Acquieſcence in the Appointment of Providence.

But though our Maker's Wiſdom hath left us greatly in the Dark about ſuch Matters, in which taking one Courſe or another is but ſeldom of conſiderable, if any, Importance to the moſt important of all Things, the Performance of our Duty: yet, in whatever hath a ſtated Connection with that, he hath given us plain Directions, both by Reaſon and Scripture, how we are to judge and behave. Now there is Nothing more cloſely connected with Virtue, than Reputation: and therefore he hath connected it as cloſely with our Happineſs: not only teaching us, by Nature, to eſteem it

as

as the chief of outward Bleſſings; but by Revelation to preſerve and cheriſh it with aſſiduous Care. The Text, which I have read to you, prefers *a good Name to great Riches.* Another ſaith, it *is better than precious Ointment* [a]: that is, than the coſtlieſt Perfumes that were anciently uſed, in the gayeſt Entertainments of the voluptuous, or the Funeral Honours of the great. And throughout the Word of God, we are excited by Examples, as well as Precepts, to aim diligently at *obtaining a good Report* [b]. Accordingly Mankind in all Ages have been ſtrongly influenced by this Principle; and, in a great Meaſure, to what they ought.

But ſtill as the moſt powerful Motives are apt to be ſlighted by ſome, and the righteſt perverted by others: there are Numbers, who profeſs to have ſcarce any Regard to Reputation; and ſtill greater, who pay it a very undue Regard. Therefore, it may be uſeful to ſhew you the Wrongneſs and the Danger,

[a] Eccl. vii. 1.
Acts vi. 3. x. 22. xxii. 12.
Heb. xi. 2. 3 John 12.

[b] 1 Sam. ii. 24. Prov. xv. 30.
Phil. iv. 8. 1 Tim. iii. 7.

I. Of

I. Of having too little Concern about it.

II. Of having too much.

I. Of having too little. One meets, not very uncommonly, with thoſe who affect a perfect Indifference to what a ſilly or malicious World, that hath Nothing to do with them or their Affairs, may pleaſe to think or talk about them. I ſay, they affect this; becauſe, for the moſt Part, it is mere Affectation: and while they pretend not to be moved at all by what is reported of them, they plainly are moved by it greatly: not enough perhaps to conduct themſelves with more Diſcretion upon it, (and ſo much the worſe for them;) but enough to be very uneaſy and angry about it. Now what really diſturbs them, it is a Folly to put on the Air of deſpiſing: and the only ſenſible Method is, to take Care and avoid it.

But they plead, that avoiding Cenſure is impoſſible: People will ſay ill-natured Things, and make ſpiteful Conſtructions: ſome will always be raiſing Stories, and others believing them: and why ſhould one give one's ſelf Trouble to prevent what after all cannot be prevented?

prevented? Nor can it be denied, that the World is very cenſorious: but it is by no Means true, that they who keep on their Guard, and they who do not, fare alike in it. Sometimes indeed very innocent and prudent Perſons may fall under very cruel Imputations: but they rarely continue under them. And therefore, if it be not a Rule without Exception, it is one with but few Exceptions, that whoever is much and generally and long evil ſpoken of, hath been faulty: very probably not in the Degree, perhaps not in the Manner, that is charged: but there hath been either an Approach towards it, or a blameable Appearance of it, or ſomething or another that ſhould not have been; elſe ſo many would not have judged, or at leaſt have perſiſted in judging, ſo unfavourably. Still their Judgement may be a ſinful one. But why ſhould we tempt them to that Sin? It is hurting both them and ourſelves. Profeſſing to deſpiſe the ill Opinion of Mankind, creates a ſhrewd Suſpicion, that we have deſerved it. For if we have not; why do we lie ſo quiet under it? Why not explain our paſt Conduct, if there be Opportunity; or, however, watch ſo carefully over our future Behaviour, as by De-

grees

grees to ſilence Calumny? It is our Duty, not only to be harmleſs, but uſeful in the World; and of what Uſe can any Perſon hope to be whom Obloquy depretiates, and expoſes to Diſlike? It is our Duty, not only to be virtuous, but exemplary in Virtue: and inſtead of that, we appear Examples of Wickedneſs, if we neglect Aſperſions thrown upon us, when we could wipe them off. And as every new Example of it, real or ſeeming, adds new Encouragement to it; the worſt of Sinners heinouſly aggravate their Sins, by ſhewing that they are not aſhamed of them; beſides the Imprudence of provoking private and public Indignation or Contempt.

But let the guilty manage as they will, ſurely the innocent muſt ſee, that their Intereſt is, not to confound themſelves with the former, and ſhare in their Reproach by diſregarding Reputation; but diſtinguiſh themſelves by a conſtant, though unaffected, Attention to it. Ill People may have their Ends in deſiring that you ſhould appear like them: but your Buſineſs is to appear different from them: otherwiſe you are ſo far virtuous to no Purpoſe. And therefore, you forget yourſelf ſtrangely, if you give up an Advantage, that

is

is peculiar to you. A good Name, of all Things, is what a bad Perſon cannot ſecure. And therefore you, that can, ſhould on no Account fail of doing it.

The Judgement of others concerning us deſerves Reſpect: and to pay it none, is a ſhocking Want of Modeſty. Beſides, Preſervation of mutual Eſteem makes Perſons amiable to each other: and in that Way contributes largely to their common Happineſs. For it is hateful to think of living in the Midſt of bad Characters only: and that ſingle Conſideration ſhould excite us powerfully to keep the Face of Things from having that Look. But further, the Senſe of Shame was given us by our Maker for a Guard to our Senſe of Duty. And as we want, on many Occaſions, every Guard that we can have; we know not what Evils may follow throwing aſide this. Perſons, who care not what they are thought, are in a very likely Way not to care what they do. And therefore, St. *Paul* hath moſt judiciouſly intermixed, as being intimately connected, Regard to Principle, and Regard to Character. *Whatſoever Things are true, whatſoever Things are honourable; whatſoever Things are lovely,*

whatſoever Things are of good Report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praiſe; think on theſe Things [c].

But were Contempt of Reputation ever ſo conſiſtent with our Innocence, it would be greatly contrary to our Intereſt notwithſtanding. A loſt, or even a doubtful Fame, in ſome Points, fixes an almoſt indelible Mark upon Perſons, which deprives them of many Advantages in Life, and often delivers them over to Scorn and Wretchedneſs, for the reſt of their Days. Nay, even when Nothing bad can be ſaid of any one, yet if but little Good can, this alone will uſually have an unhappy Influence on his future Situation: whereas an eminently fair Character prepoſſeſſes every Body in the Favour of him who bears it: engages friendly Treatment, begets Truſt and Confidence, gives Credit and Weight. Such will always be ſought after and employed, reſpected in their Proſperity, aſſiſted under Diſtreſſes: in ſhort this Diſtinction is, in Effect, beyond all that can be named, Honour, and Power, and Wealth.

But then further, it is Pleaſure too, which

[c] Phil. iv. 8.

only

only one other, near akin to it, can exceed or equal. For next to the Conſciouſneſs of being good and worthy, that of being eſteemed ſo, eſpecially by thoſe, who are ſuch themſelves, is undoubtedly the joyfulleſt Feeling in the Heart of Man, and diffuſes the higheſt Satisfaction through every Intercourſe of Life. But very afflicting muſt their inward Senſations be, who know they are juſtly hated, ſuſpected or deſpiſed: and in the Midſt of Society muſt wander about, uneſteemed and friendleſs.

Another very material Conſideration is, that, though Offenders often return completely to their Duty, it is but ſeldom and imperfectly that they ever regain their Characters, when once forfeited: whereas, by preſerving them, they ſecure not only many and great preſent Benefits, but the pleaſing Proſpect, in which our Maker hath, with unſpeakable Goodneſs, formed us to delight, of leaving an honourable Memory behind them for their Family to inherit; and a valuable Bequeſt it frequently proves: while hereditary Infamy is the cruel Portion, that others leave to their Poſterity and Kindred. *Have Regard to thy Name*, ſaith the wiſe Son of *Sirach, for that ſhall continue*

above a thouſand great Treaſures of Gold. A happy Life hath but a few Days: but a good Name endureth for ever [d]. On all Accounts then it is our Wiſdom as well as our Duty, to *provide for honeſt Things, not only in the Sight of the Lord, but alſo in the Sight of Men* [e].

Still, it muſt be owned, there are Occaſions on which neglecting both Parts of this Rule may appear the ſhorteſt Way to worldly Proſperity. But theſe Appearances are often deceitful. And when they prove ſuch, what hath the Wretch, who ventures upon this Courſe, done? He hath loſt his Honour, and loſt his Peace, and got Nothing for them. But whatever he gets, he will find his Bargain at laſt a very dear one. He will feel himſelf inwardly no longer the ſame Man, that he was: he will ſee himſelf treated, by the better Part of Mankind at leaſt, with the Coldneſs, which he knows to come ſhort of his Deſert; the Reſpect paid him by the reſt will be of very uncertain Duration; and while it laſts, he will perceive it, by many a Token, to be mere Outſide. He will be afraid perpetually, that ſome Turn of Affairs may take

[d] Eccluſ xli. 12, 13. [e] 2 Cor. viii. 21.

away

away from him the Advantages of his Baſeneſs, and leave him only the Ignominy of it. Or, how well ſoever he may eſcape, or how little ſoever he may value, the Shame of this World; that of the next can neither be avoided nor contemned.

There can be no Doubt then, but Reputation deſerves a very great Regard. And therefore I proceed,

II. To warn you againſt ſhewing an over-great Regard to it.

Many ſeem to think, that a fair Appearance is all they want: and accordingly take little Care to ſupport it by Reality. But, without the latter, the former will quickly be ſeen through. And in the mean Time, while few or none elſe know them, their Knowledge of themſelves, and perpetual Fears that others will find them out, muſt ſurely leave them very ſmall Pleaſure in *having*, as the Scripture expreſſes it, *a Name that they live, and being* in Truth *dead*[f].

Many more, if they are guilty of Nothing, which the World thinks enormous, imagine they are quite as good as they need to be:

[f] Rev. iii. 1.

forgetting, that *the Lord ſeeth not as Man ſeeth* [g], but often *that, which is highly eſteemed amongſt Men, is Abomination in the Sight of God* [h], who knows the ſecret Springs, whence every Word and Action flow. Let us reflect then, that we are to approve our Lives and Hearts, not merely to our Fellow-creatures; but to our Maker, who is perfect in Holineſs: that we may indeed *have whereof to glory before Men*; *but* we can *not before God* [i]; *in whoſe Sight ſhall no Man living be juſtified* [k] by his own Works. *Bleſſed is he, to whom Faith* in Chriſt, productive of continual Study to amend and improve, *is counted for Righteouſneſs:* for *to him the Lord will not impute Sin* [l].

But a ſtill worſe Degree, if poſſible, of immoderate Regard to our Reputation is, when, to raiſe or preſerve it, we tranſgreſs our Duty. And it is ſurely a ſtrange Perverſeneſs in human Nature, that, though Fear of Diſeſteem, with every other Motive added to it, is frequently inſufficient to keep us from acting wrong; yet, on other Occaſions, that Fear

[g] 1 Sam. xvi. 7. [h] Luke xvi. 15. [i] Rom. iv. 2. [k] Pſ. cxliii. 2. Rom. iii. 20. Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11. [l] Rom. iv. 5—8.

alone,

alone, in Oppoſition to every other Motive, is abundantly ſufficient to keep us from acting right. Cuſtom and Faſhion have brought ſome Parts of Morals, and almoſt the Whole of Piety, into utter Diſgrace. At leaſt too many either imprudently chuſe, or unhappily fall into ſuch Acquaintance, that they muſt loſe their Character with them, unleſs they will throw off their Virtue and Religion. No Wonder if poor thoughtleſs Creatures often ſink under this Temptation. *But Wo to thoſe, by whom the Offence cometh*[m]; who, not content to be vicious and profane themſelves, add unprovoked the further and greater Wickedneſs of perſecuting others by Ridicule and Invective into the ſame Guilt. A Perſecution however far from being formidable enough to afford any tolerable Excuſe for ſuch as yield to it. The vain, and ſhewy, and bold, who call themſelves the World, and pretend to diſpoſe of Contempt and Applauſe as they will, have it not ſo entirely by any Means in their own Hands, as they would ſeem. For, beſides that the Nature of Things cannot be altered; were the Numbers of ſuch Perſons larger than it is, yet their Weight is not

[m] Matth. xviii. 7.

anſwerable to it. And though the wiſe and good may, in Proportion, be few; yet their Judgement is, and will be reſpected by many. So that whoever is truly diſpoſed to be pious and virtuous will never want competent Protection, if he doth but ſeek for it by cultivating proper Friendſhips; but let the Generality be ever ſo bad, will gain, upon the Whole, more Reputation than he loſes, by adhering to his Duty.

Yet, ſuppoſing this were otherwiſe, it ſhould be conſidered, that the Eſteem of the worthleſs is very ill purchaſed at the Price of becoming like them: and that the moſt fatal Conſequences daily proceed from Perſons being led by the Folly of others, rather than their own good Senſe, and that of their diſcreeter and more experienced Friends. But above all, it ſhould be conſidered, how *ſmall a Thing it is to be judged of Man's Judgement*, when *he that judgeth us is the Lord*[n]: who hath expreſsly ſaid, what he will aſſuredly verify, *Them that honour me, I will honour: and they that deſpiſe me ſhall be lightly eſteemed*[o]. Seldom will this fail in the preſent Life; but never in the next: when *they, who ſleep in the Duſt of the*

[n] 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. [o] 1 Sam. ii. 30.

Earth,

Earth, ſhall awake; ſome to everlaſting Life, and ſome to Shame and everlaſting Contempt [p]. Therefore, notwithſtanding all the Cenſures of this World, *let us run with Patience the Race that is ſet before us; looking unto Jeſus, the Author and Finiſher of our Faith; who endured the Croſs, deſpiſing the Shame, and is ſet down at the right Hand of the Throne of God* [q].

Another Caſe, in which, to preſerve a Character with their Acquaintance, Perſons will do what every one elſe, and they themſelves often, ſee to be wrong, is that of Party-wickedneſs. Very frequently Prejudices of Education, worldly Intereſt, Vehemence of Temper hurry them into it. But frequently alſo, their ſole Inducement is, that if they ſhould ſtop ſhort, their Friends would look coldly upon them, and think meanly of them; and they cannot bear the Reproach of not having been true to their Side. What a wretched Principle now is this! And yet tolerably good Perſons will be carried ſtrange Lengths by it: and others, any Lengths whatever. We find in St. *John*, that on hearing our Saviour's Diſcourſes, *many among the chief Rulers* of the Jews, inwardly

[p] Dan. xii. 2. [q] Heb. xii. 1, 2.

believed

believed on him, but becauſe of the Phariſees, they did not confeſs him, leſt they ſhould be put out of the Synagogue. For they loved the Praiſe of Men, more than the Praiſe of God[r]. Now juſt the ſame Thing, which got the better of their Conviction in this Reſpect, gets the better of moſt Men's in one Reſpect or another: and they will not reflect, that as the Temptations to raiſe or preſerve a Reputation by joining in the Exceſſes of Party, are often the moſt trifling, and eaſieſt to be reſiſted, that can be; ſo, when the Trial is harder, the Duty is ſtill the ſame; but the Victory will be the more honourable, and the Reward the greater.

A further Inſtance, and a very criminal one, of preferring the good Opinion of others to their own Conſcience is, when Perſons, having been guilty of ſome Folly or Sin, will be guilty of almoſt any Thing to cover it, rather than expoſe themſelves. At one Time they will immediately commit a very great Fault to conceal a very ſmall one. At others, they will begin, for that Purpoſe, only with what ſeems a pretty harmleſs Tranſgreſſion.

[r] John xii. 42, 43.

But

But that doth not ſucceed, perhaps entangles them yet worſe: and ſo they are drawn on, till inſtead of confeſſing at firſt a ſingle Error, they are ſhamefully convicted at laſt of many. But if they could, by ſuch Means, eſcape ever ſo clear, theſe are not Means, by which they ought to eſcape. Even an innocent Perſon hath no Right to uſe other than innocent Methods for his Defence: much leſs is having done one bad Thing an Excuſe for doing a ſecond. So far indeed as honeſt Prudence will hide our Diſgrace, we are doubtleſs in the Right to employ it. But if that will not ſuffice; what we have deſerved we muſt patiently undergo, as a juſt Correction, and ſalutary Diſcipline to produce Repentance. There lies our Way back: and it is in vain to ſeek for any other. If we are diſpoſed to take this only right Courſe, all good Perſons will think it a Duty ſtrictly binding them (for indeed it is an important one) to make our Return as eaſy to us, as poſſible: never to reproach us more with what we have heartily condemned ourſelves for; but hold us in that Honour, of which a true Penitent may ſometimes deſerve a higher Degree, than thoſe who have never offended. And though the

World

World ſhould, as probably it will, do us this Juſtice but imperfectly; yet bearing, in a virtuous Manner, whatever Shame our Faults may bring upon us in this Life, will contribute to increaſe our Glory in the next.

One other bad Way of aiming at Reputation, which muſt be mentioned, is, when we demoliſh that of others, to raiſe our own, and build it on the Ruins. Every one feels how grievous this Injury is, when done to himſelf: and therefore knows the Wickedneſs of doing it to his Neighbour. Nor truly is the Folly much leſs. Let another Perſon's Character in any Reſpect be thought or proved ever ſo contemptible or ſo bad, mine continues but juſt what it was. And as for any Hope, that it may be the more admired, when the other is lowered; on the contrary, it will be obſerved, who hath taken Pains to lower it. And they, who are known to give ſuch Treatment, generally meet, as they well deſerve, with a double Share of it. Candor towards all, of whom we ſpeak, is the true Art of obtaining it towards ourſelves: whereas *he that hath ſhewed no Mercy, ſhall,* both from God and Man, *have Judgement without Mercy*[s].

[s] James ii. 13.

But

But beſides thoſe, who are led into any of theſe Sins by an undue Fondneſs for Reputation; they alſo are blameable, who allow it to give them too much Uneaſineſs. A good Name is indeed the moſt valuable of all earthly Things: but, like the reſt of them, may be the Subject of too much Anxiety. If we are not eſteemed by everybody as we ought; if unjuſt Imputations are thrown, and, for a Time, reſt, upon us, nay ſhould it happen to be a conſiderable Time: provided it be not our Fault, let us make it as light a Misfortune as we can. Perhaps it is for having done our Duty, that we are traduced: and what is our Caſe then? *Bleſſed are ye, when Men ſhall revile you, and ſay all Manner of Evil againſt you falſely for my Sake*[t]. Or, ſuppoſing the Occaſion to be not ſo meritorious; yet it is ſome Alleviation, that theſe Things, in ſuch a World as the preſent, are of Courſe to be expected. We live among Perſons that will detract and miſinterpret: and truly we are too prone to do like them. Beſides, without any ill Diſpoſition, they miſtake our Attainments and Accompliſhments, we miſtake theirs, and it cannot be otherwiſe. Doubtleſs we ſhould avoid both

[t] Matth. v. 11.

making and occaſioning ſuch Miſtakes as far as we can. But when we have done our beſt, it is no more to be hoped that the moſt excellent Perſon upon Earth ſhould have from all Mankind a perfectly good Report, than that the moſt regular Perſon upon Earth ſhould at all Times enjoy perfectly good Health. Proper Care, generally ſpeaking, will ſecure us tolerably in both Reſpects; at leaſt will recover us again. And, as our Health may ſometimes be the better afterwards for having gone through a ſharp Fit of Sickneſs: ſo may our Character for ſuffering a ſevere Trial. At leaſt, ſuch an Exerciſe of our Patience and Meekneſs, if we preſerve them, will do us a great deal more Service, than the Loſs of a little Eſteem can do us Harm. But it muſt be ſaid again, that let Perſons only be virtuous and diſcreet, mild and humble, peaceful and charitable; that is, let them be truly good, and uſe but common Precautions, that *their Good be not Evil ſpoken of*[u]; and they will ſeldom fail of ſupporting a fair Reputation.

As for a high one, that is not ſo eaſy to be gained: but neither is it ſo proper to be much deſired. He indeed who is conſcious, that,

[u] Rom. xiv. 16.

were

were his Merit known, it would enable him to be ſingularly uſeful, may and ſhould, if he is ſure that this is both true and his true Motive, ſtrive earneſtly to be conſpicuous: but we are ſtrangely apt to deceive ourſelves in each of theſe Points. And, if we have little more than Self-Gratification in View: vehement Solicitude, in moſt Caſes, gives more Uneaſineſs, than Succeſs gives Pleaſure. But Solicitude for Fame hath this further Unhappineſs, that, as very few have really any conſiderable Title to it, moſt of the Candidates for it muſt be diſappointed: and ſo much the more certainly the more forward they are in their Pretenſions. For in Proportion as we betray that Weakneſs, we ſtrongly tempt the World, not only to withhold the Eſteem which we deſerve, but even to withdraw that which they had beſtowed upon us. And further, if Perſons will affect to raiſe themſelves to a vaſt Height in popular Opinion, though it ſhould provoke Nobody to pull their Building down, it would in all Likelihood, after a While, overturn of itſelf, or ſink under its own Weight. Our Buſineſs therefore is to take the utmoſt Care, that our Foundation be ſolid: but a lofty Superſtructure is rather to be feared than wiſhed.

And, beſides the Imprudence of the Thing, it is really Injuſtice to demand of the World more Regard than we have a Right to, and charge them with what they do not owe us. Nor is even this the worſt of the Caſe. Perſons, who claim too much, are frequently driven to unfair and even criminal Methods of getting their Claim allowed: and there are many in the World, who would have deſerved a very good Name, if they had not been too earneſt and too haſty for a great one. Here then, the truly valuable Reputation is loſt in Purſuit of a Shadow, which is ſeldom overtaken. To be admired is what we long for: to be diſliked and deſpiſed is what we uſually get. Or, if we ſucceed better, perhaps the Paſſion, to which we make ſo coſtly a Sacrifice, is only that of being celebrated for ſome errant Trifle: though indeed, be it what it will, every Thing is a Trifle, compared to a right State of Mind and right Conduct of Life. The Reputation of making theſe Things our Study is what we ſhould aim at: and as, in Virtue, the chief Point is, to do Nothing ill; ſo, in Character, it is to have Nothing ill ſaid of us. After that, it cannot but be deſirable to have Good ſaid; and, in the Main, to know it. But a general and a ſlight Knowledge is quite ſufficient.

We

We may have full as much Pleaſure from that, as will be of any Uſe to us. And liſtening after Particulars, and wanting to hear a great deal of ourſelves, both is wrong and leads wrong. They, whoſe Praiſe is worth having, we may be ſure, will never give us a large Quantity of it before our Faces. And therefore ſuch as do, either are bad or weak Perſons themſelves, or think us ſo. At leaſt they take the ready Way to make us ſo. For there is not upon Earth a more enſnaring Temptation, than that of too fond a Self-complacency. Correcting our many and great Faults is our proper Employment: delighting in our own Praiſes and imagined Excellencies, a very unſafe and pernicious one. Let it be our Care then to mind our Work *by* an humble and *patient Continuance in well-doing:* and as to our Reward, the leſs eager we are for it in this World, the more abundantly we ſhall receive, in the next, *Glory, and Honour, and Immortality*[w].

[w] Rom. ii. 7.

SERMON XVI.

GAL. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus neither Circumciſion availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumciſion, but a new Creature.

THESE Words relate to that firſt Diſpute amongſt Chriſtians, whether the Law of *Moſes* was ſtill to be obſerved: which, though it hath long been out of Queſtion, and now perhaps the Difficulty ſeems to be only, how the Obſervation of ſuch a Law could ever be required at all, was yet a very natural Subject of Controverſy, and plainly a very important one, when our Religion began to ſpread in the World: and there is ſuch perpetual Reference to it in St. *Paul*'s Epiſtles, that they have been greatly miſunderſtood for Want of

carrying it in Mind. And therefore, I ſhall, in two Diſcourſes on theſe Words,

I. Vindicate the Juſtice and Goodneſs of God in diſtinguiſhing the Jews by a peculiar Covenant:

II. Give an Account of the Expiration of that Covenant, and its ceaſing to oblige or avail any Part of Mankind:

III. Shew, what alone can avail Men; and explain the Phraſe of *a new Creature*, by which the Apoſtle here expreſſes it.

I. I ſhall vindicate the Juſtice and Goodneſs of Providence, in diſtinguiſhing the Jews, from the reſt of the World, by a peculiar Covenant.

God is no Reſpecter of Perſons: but in every Age and *Nation, they who feared him and worked Righteouſneſs*, have always been *accepted with him*[a]. The Rewards of Innocence, had Man continued innocent, would have extended to the whole human Race: as did the ſad Conſequences of our firſt Parents Fall. From theſe God equally relieved all their Deſcendents: and received them into a ſecond Covenant of Grace and Forgiveneſs, on the equita-

[a] Acts x. 34, 35.

ble

ble Terms of a ſincere, though imperfect Obedience, having for its Principle, the Belief more or leſs explicit, in Proportion as Revelation was, that *he is, and is a Rewarder of them that ſeek him* [b]. This Faith ſaved *Noah, the Preacher* and Practiſer of *Righteouſneſs* [c], with his Family, when *all Fleſh* beſides, having *corrupted their Way* [d], were deſtroyed by the Deluge: that, after ſo exemplary a Puniſhment of Sin, the World might begin anew from that good Man, with better Hopes of their obſerving for the future the Laws of the Almighty. Again, to all the Deſcendents of *Noah*, without Exception, God equally delivered his Precepts and his Promiſes: nor made any Diſtinction amongſt them, till they had made one amongſt themſelves, by revolting in great Numbers from true Religion to Idolatry and Wickedneſs. And then, as he had enabled them to *ſee* originally, *from the Things that were made, his eternal Power and Godhead* [e]; as he had formed them to *be a Law to themſelves* [f], by the Authority of natural Conſcience within them; as he had ſuperadded ſuch ſtrong Manifeſtations of his Acceptance

[b] Heb. xi. 6. [c] 2 Pet. ii. 5. [d] Gen. vi. 12.
[e] Rom. i. 20. [f] Rom ii. 14.

of Piety and Virtue, and his Abhorrence of Sin: what Ground could there have been for Complaint, if he had left them to obſerve, or neglect at their Peril, the Notices already given them; without interpoſing any farther to direct them in this World; only reſerving for the next ſuch Rewards or Puniſhments, as were ſuitable to their Behaviour? And yet there is Reaſon to think, from occaſional Intimations in Scripture, that Warnings and Inſtructions from Heaven were ſtill frequently vouchſafed to Mankind.

But one Man in particular, *Abraham*, and his Deſcendents, God was pleaſed to bleſs, beyond others, with Communications of his Will; and admit into a Covenant of peculiar Favour: which to many hath appeared a Preference very partial, and unkind to the reſt of the World. But would it have been kinder to beſtow this Favour on none, than on ſome? The reſt of the World were not in a worſe Condition than before, though the Jews were in a better. God did not abandon the general Care of Mankind, when he took that People into his more eſpecial Protection. The other Nations of the Earth had ſtill a Right to all the old Promiſes of Mercy, though the Jews had

had new ones given them. Accordingly we find, after the Call of *Abraham*, *Melchizedek*, a Gentile, not only an acceptable Worſhipper himſelf, but a *Prieſt* to others *of the moſt high God*[g]: and ſuch a one, whoſe Prieſthood more fully reſembled our bleſſed Lord's, than that of *Aaron* did. Again we find that holy Man *Job*, though a Gentile alſo, fully equal in God's Eſteem to any of thoſe, who were diſtinguiſhed for his choſen People, by the Marks of his Covenant.

Still, if, upon this, we are aſked the Queſtion, which the Apoſtle ſuppoſes to be put, *What Advantage then had the Jew?* We anſwer with him: *Much every Way: chiefly, becauſe that unto them were committed the Oracles of God*[h]. From the very Time of *Abraham*'s Call, he and his Poſterity had fuller Notifications of God's Will, and ſtronger Inſtances of his providential Care, than other Men. But from the Time, when *Moſes* appeared amongſt them, they had unheard-of Demonſtrations of divine Power, exerting itſelf for their Deliverance and Protection; and a viſible Appearance of the divine Glory, leading them from the Land of Bondage to that of Promiſe. They had a Law delivered

[g] Gen. xiv. 18. [h] Rom. iii. 1, 2.

to them, with inexpreſſible Solemnity, by the Mouth of God himſelf: and though it may ſeem hard to account for ſome Part of it, eſpecially to the unlearned, at the preſent Diſtance of above three thouſand Years; yet, ſo far as we have the Means of judging, it even now ſhews itſelf, on the Whole, admirably fitted, in their Circumſtances, to preſerve them from the Idolatry and Immoralities of their Neighbours, and eſtabliſh amongſt them the Belief and Practice of true Religion: to convince them of their Inability of fulfilling a perfect Obedience, and therefore their Need of God's Mercy; to prefigure, by the Appointment of a ceremonial Service, a ſpiritual one to come; and by the Inſtitution of typical Sacrifices to be offered daily, the true and efficacious Sacrifice and Prieſthood of that Perſon, through whom Pardon and Grace were derived to Mankind. Then, beſides the Eſtabliſhment of ſuch a Law amongſt them, God was perpetually exciting them to Good, and deterring them from Evil; by the Interpoſition of an extraordinary Providence, to reward their Obedience, or puniſh their Diſobedience; and by the Warnings and Exhortations of Prophets, raiſed up

ſucceſſively; who alſo both explained and improved the Inſtructions, which *Moſes* had given them.

Theſe were doubtleſs great Advantages: but that other Nations had not the ſame, is no more an Objection againſt the divine Juſtice and Goodneſs, than that all Nations or all Men at preſent have not in all Reſpects the ſame Advantages, that ſome have. It ſuffices, that of each ſhall be required *according to what he hath, not according to what he hath not* [1]. But as to every Thing beyond this, God is Maſter of his own Gifts: and we are incompetent Judges, how he ought to diſpoſe of them. Yet in the Diſpoſal, of which I am ſpeaking, we may trace evident Footſteps of Wiſdom, and extenſive Mercy. While the reſt of the World was falling into Superſtition and Idolatry, *Abraham* diſtinguiſhed himſelf by a faithful Practice of true Religion: and therefore was properly a diſtinguiſhed Object of divine Favour. He was careful alſo to educate his Family in the ſame Principles; as God himſelf bears him Witneſs. *For I know Abraham; that he will command his Children and his Houſehold after*

[1] 2 Cor. viii. 12.

him,

him, and they ſhall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Juſtice and Judgement[k]. It was therefore no groundleſs Preference, but a moſt reaſonable Proceeding; to build on the Foundations already laid and remaining; and reward Perſons, found to be ſo well diſpoſed, by conferring on them further Privileges; of which, with all their Faults, they were much likelier to make a good Uſe, than any of their more corrupted Neighbours.

Yet to theſe likewiſe, and to all Men, God had gracious Intentions in every Thing, which he did for his peculiar People. One of the firſt Promiſes made to *Abraham*, was, that *in him and in his Seed ſhould all the Nations of the Earth be bleſſed*[l]. This indeed received not its full Accompliſhment, till our Saviour, the great Bleſſing of all Nations, came. But it was in ſome Meaſure verifying continually, from the Day it was made. Had all Men been left to themſelves at that Time, the Knowledge of true Religion might have been every where loſt. But ſecuring the Profeſſion of it amongſt the Deſcendents of *Abraham*, was preſerving a Witneſs for God upon Earth, and that

[k] Gen. xviii. 19. [l] Gen. xii. 3. xviii. 18. xxii. 18.

in

in a Part of it, perhaps as well peopled and as well esteemed, as any then known. There they *shone* forth, first in *Canaan*, then in *Egypt*, *as Lights in a dark Place*[m], to attract the Eyes and direct the Steps of the well-disposed. And this is a Benefit of great Consequence. For Truth proposed is much more easily perceived, than without such Proposal it is discovered. And when the Almighty brought them back from *Egypt* to *Canaan* again, by such amazing Miracles as the Scripture relates, these were so many loud Declarations from Heaven to Mankind, concerning their Duty: nor have we Reason to doubt, but many were alarmed and convinced by their Means: which indeed is expressly mentioned, as one End proposed by them: *And the Egyptians shall know, that I am the Lord*[n]. Accordingly there *went out*, we read, *a mixed Multitude with*[o] the *Israelites*: and who could they be, but such as were brought to believe in the true God? For Worshippers of false Gods they were not to suffer amongst them. Again, soon after this, *Jethro*, a Man of high Rank, and therefore probably of great Influence, amongst the *Midianites*; how strongly doth he declare,

[m] 2 Pet. i. 19. [n] Exod. vii. 5. [o] Exod. xii. 38.

what

what Effect theſe Wonders had on him? *And Jethro ſaid, Bleſſed be the Lord, who hath delivered you out of the Hands of the Egyptians—Now I know that the Lord is greater than all Gods*[p]. Further ſtill: where-ever we find in the Law, as we do very frequently, Mention of the *Strangers, that ſhould ſojourn in the Land of Iſrael*; theſe were many of them indeed no Proſelytes to the Whole of the Jewiſh Covenant, but all of them Worſhippers of the Maker of Heaven and Earth only. And though, by the wiſe Direction of God, *Moſes* prohibited the Admiſſion of Idolaters amongſt the People; yet by the ſame Direction he enjoined the utmoſt Humanity and Tenderneſs to all, that preſerved the Religion of the Children of *Noah*, or of Nature, in any tolerable Degree uncorrupted. In the ſame Spirit, *Solomon* too puts up an earneſt Petition for ſuch, in his Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple. *Moreover concerning a Stranger, that is not of thy People Iſrael, but cometh out of a far Country, for thy Name's Sake: (for they ſhall hear of thy great Name, and of thy ſtrong Hand, and of thy ſtretched-out Arm:) when he ſhall come, and pray towards this*

[p] Exod. xviii. 10, 11.

Houſe;

Houſe; hear thou in Heaven thy Dwelling-Place, and do according to all that the Stranger calleth to thee for: that all the People of the Earth may know thy Name, to fear thee, as do thy People Iſrael[q].

Nor were the Jews of Service only in their flouriſhing State, to ſupport true Religion in the World: but under their Afflictions and Captivities they ſpread it much further, than they could before. Whilſt they were their own Maſters in their own Land, the peculiar Inſtitutions of their Law conſiderably leſſened the Freedom of their Intercourſe with Strangers. And theſe Reſtraints, though extremely neceſſary, as it very plainly appeared, to preſerve the Purity of their Religion, were otherwiſe great Hindrances to the Propagation of it. But when they were led Captive into the Lands of their Enemies, and the Puniſhment of their Sins had given them a ſteadier Zeal for their Duty; then they became extenſively uſeful to the Nations, amongſt whom Neceſſity mixed them; as both the Reaſonableneſs of their Faith, compared with Heatheniſm, was eaſy to be ſeen; and as Pro-

[q] 1 Kings viii. 41—43.

phecies

phecies fulfilled, or Miracles performed in their Favour, could not but recommend the Worſhip of that Being, whom they ſerved. By theſe Means, their Conqueror *Nebuchadnezzar* was brought to declare him, *God of Gods, and Lord of Kings, all whoſe Works are Truth, and his Ways Judgement*[r]. On theſe Accounts did *Darius* the *Mede* decree, *that in every Dominion of his Kingdom, Men ſhould tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and ſtedfaſt for ever*[s]. And *Cyrus*, whom *Iſaiah* had foretold by Name, above 100 Years before his Birth, for the Reſtorer of the People from their Captivity, acknowledged by a written Proclamation, ſent through his whole Empire, that the God of the *Jews* had *given him all the Kingdoms of the Earth*[t].

Nor is there ſufficient Ground to think, that theſe Notices of true Religion were ſoon loſt again. On the contrary, from them proceeded very probably the great Reformation made in the Notions of the Eaſtern Part of the World, by *Zoroaſter:* whoſe Doctrine and Form of Worſhip, was the pureſt that the Heathen knew. And many have apprehended,

[r] Dan. ii. 47. iv. 37. [s] Dan. vi. 26. [t] Ezr. i. 1, 2.

not

not without ſpecious Appearances of Reaſon, that almoſt the whole Knowledge of God, which the *Greek* Philoſophers had, was derived to them, ultimately, if not immediately, from the Revelations made to the Jews. But however that might be; it is certain, that after the Time of *Alexander*, this Nation was diffuſed wider through the World; and, in every City which they inhabited, erected Synagogues for divine Worſhip, and for reading and explaining the holy Scriptures; to which reſorted, as we find in the new Teſtament, many devout Perſons amongſt the Gentiles, who had learned from the Jews to fear God. And thus, as *Iſaiah* foretold, did the *Law go forth from Zion, and the Word of the Lord from Jeruſalem* [u], conveying ſuch Degrees of Light to all Nations around, as prepared them to receive *the Sun of Righteouſneſs*, when in the Fulneſs of Time he *aroſe, with Healing in his Wings* [w].

But though they were Inſtruments of Good to the World, they fell at Length themſelves into pernicious Errors. Being diſtinguiſhed by the Obſervances of their Law from other Nations, they grew ſo wrongly vain of thoſe

[u] Iſa. ii. 3. [w] Mal. iv. 2.

Diſ-

Diſtinctions, which in Reality were mortifying Proofs of their Unfitneſs to be truſted without Reſtraints, that they placed all the Value of their Religion in the Outworks of it; and deſpiſed and hated the reſt of Mankind, whom this Separation of theirs was intended to inſtruct and ſerve. Again, having Promiſes made to them of a Prince of the Houſe of *David*, whom all People were to obey, they abſurdly imagined, notwithſtanding many Evidences in their own Scriptures to the contrary, that this was to be, not a ſpiritual Kingdom, influencing Mens Hearts, and protecting them from Sin, and rewarding them with eternal Happineſs; but a temporal one, like thoſe of this World, the Honours and Profits of which they ſhould ſhare, and tyrannize over the Earth. So that when their expected Meſſiah came, finding him not to anſwer theſe vain and wicked Hopes, they rejected and *crucified the Lord of Glory* [x]. Thus then did the *Jews*, after *preaching* for ſo many Ages *to others*, become themſelves *Caſt-aways* [y]: and have continued ever ſince under viſible Marks of divine Diſpleaſure. Yet they perform to this Day the Office, to which they were at firſt ap-

[x] 1 Cor. ii. 8. [y] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

pointed,

pointed, of bearing Witneſs to true Religion: being preſerved a diſtinct People, though diſperſed through the World, for ſo long a Time, as no one beſides from the Creation ever was, in like Circumſtances; and demonſtrating all the While the Uncorruptneſs of thoſe Books, in which both they and we believe, and from which, in a great Meaſure, we prove the Truth of our Religion, againſt themſelves, as well as other Infidels. Nor is this the whole Service, of the ſame Kind, to which they are deſtined. For in God's good Time, they ſhall give a new and illuſtrious, (and who knows how ſeaſonable?) Atteſtation to Chriſtianity, by their Converſion; and the *receiving of them* again into the Church ſhall be as *Life from the dead*[z]. For ſo their own Prophets have foretold, that God *will pour on them the Spirit of Grace and of Supplications; and they ſhall look upon him whom they have pierced, and ſhall mourn: and in that Day ſhall be a Fountain opened to them for Sin and for Uncleanneſs: they ſhall call on his Name, and he will hear them: He will ſay, it is my People; and they ſhall ſay, the Lord is my God*[a].

Thus I have given you, I hope, a ſufficient

[z] Rom. xi. 15. [a] Zech. xii. 10. xiii. 1, 9.

Vindication of the divine Juſtice and Goodneſs, in diſtinguiſhing the Jews by a peculiar Covenant. And now I proceed,

II. To ſpeak concerning the Expiration of that Covenant, and its ceaſing to oblige or avail any Part of Mankind. You will naturally underſtand me to mean, that ſuch Things only ceaſed, as were peculiar to the Moſaic Diſpenſation: whether Ceremonies in Religion, or Methods of proceeding in Civil Government. For what all Men were bound to, before the Law of *Moſes*, they were certainly bound to, afterwards. And wherever that Law was merely an Explanation of the Law of Nature, the Explanation was a juſt and authorized one, and ought to be followed by as many, as come to the Knowledge of it.

But the Jewiſh Converts to Chriſtianity, who were the firſt it had, and, though not the Majority of that People, yet a large Number, were inclined to carry the Matter much farther than this. They were indeed humble and reaſonable enough to receive Jeſus for the Meſſiah: but ſtill they were proud enough to think, that he was ſent only to themſelves. Accordingly the Apoſtles for ſome Time preached the

Goſpel to none, but their own Nation. And when St. *Peter* was ſatisfied by a Viſion from Heaven of the Duty of doing otherwiſe, they that were of the Circumciſion blamed him for what he had done: till, having an Account laid before them of the Authority he went upon, *they held their Peace, and glorified God, ſaying: Then hath God alſo to the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life* [b]. But when this Difficulty was over, another very great one was immediately ſtarted; whether he had granted it on any other Terms, than their obſerving the Jewiſh Law: on which Point was held a Council at *Jeruſalem*, as you may read, *Acts* xv. where after the Matter had been throughly debated, the Apoſtles, Elders, and Brethren, directed by the Holy Ghoſt, unanimouſly determined, that ſince the Jews had never been able to keep their own Law in Strictneſs; and therefore could not themſelves be ſaved, but through the Grace of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; and ſince the Gentiles, without the Law, had not only been purified by the ſame Faith, but had received the ſame Gifts of the Holy Ghoſt, with the Jews; this was Evidence enough, that they were accepted in

[b] Acts xi. 1—18.

their preſent Condition, as the Prophets had intimated they ſhould: and therefore it was needleſs and unjuſt to lay a new Yoke upon them, which they had never been enjoined before to undertake, nor would be able to bear now.

But even after this, one Doubt remained ſtill, whether the Jews at leaſt ought not to continue obſerving their own Law. For it had been declared in the old Teſtament an Ordinance to endure *for ever*[c]. And our Saviour himſelf had not only, purſuant to its Direction, been circumciſed in his Infancy, but throughout his Life was obedient to every Precept of the Moſaic Covenant: and therefore it might ſeem requiſite, that all his Diſciples of that Nation ſhould be ſo too. Now contradicting this Notion immediately and openly, muſt, conſidering how fond the Jews were of their religious Ceremonies, have proved a great Hindrance to their embracing the Faith of Chriſt. And therefore he did not appriſe his very Apoſtles clearly at firſt of his whole Intention, as to theſe Matters; but told them, that *he had many Things to ſay unto them, which then they could not bear; but that*

[c] Exod. xii. 14, &c.

when

when the Spirit of Truth ſhould come, he would guide them into all Truth[d]. And after they were more fully inſtructed, they exerciſed great Prudence and Patience towards their Countrymen: permitting, and even practiſing along with them, for a While, what they knew to be unneceſſary; and gently looſening their deeply-rooted Prejudices. For, when examined with Care, they will evidently appear to be Nothing more than Prejudices. The Phraſe, *for ever*, uſed concerning the Continuance of the Law, is uſed in that Law itſelf concerning very ſmall Periods of Time; the Term of a Man's Life, the Term of fifty Years and leſs: in ſhort, it means no more, than this; that what is appointed, ſhall be done, ſo long as the State of Things, to which the Appointment refers, ſhall laſt. And therefore, notwithſtanding ſuch Words; when Circumſtances viſibly alter, God may as juſtly and as wiſely repeal any of his Laws, as Men do many of theirs, into which the ſame, and like Words, have been inſerted. Now the Coming of Chriſt made a moſt evident and material Alteration. It was indeed very fit, that to ſhew himſelf perfectly obedient, and

[d] John xvi. 12, 13.

prevent all Poſſibility of Cavil againſt him on that Head, he ſhould fulfil the whole Righteouſneſs of the Covenant, under which he was born. But when he had exhibited the Subſtance of thoſe good Things, of which the legal Ceremonies were Shadows; and completed all that the Moſaic Diſpenſation prefigured, one great End of its Exiſtence plainly ceaſed. When Men were grown capable, as God ſaw they were by that Time, of a freer, and more ſpiritual, and manly Service, inſtead of thoſe formal Reſtraints to keep them from going wrong, and thoſe outward carnal Ordinances to ſtrike their Imaginations, under which they had been placed in the earlier Ages, compared by the Apoſtle to a State of Childhood [e]: then a ſecond Deſign of the Law ceaſed. And when the Time came, in which God judged it proper, that the Jews, who had been diſtinguiſhed from the Gentiles, to preſerve true Religion in the World for their common Benefit, ſhould be reunited to them, that they might practiſe it together, and *be one Fold under one Shepherd*; then the third End of the Law ceaſed; and *breaking down the Wall of Partition* [f], that is taking away the Cere-

[e] Gal. iv. 1, &c.

[f] Eph. ii. 14.

monies

monies that ſeparated them, contributed much, not only to the Uniformity and Beauty of Chriſtianity, but to the Preſervation of Harmony and Love, and the Avoidance of Jealouſy and Complaint, amongſt its Profeſſors: Beſides, that indeed many of the Inſtitutions of *Moſes* were calculated for the Uſe only of one ſmall Nation, as that Nation to which he preſcribed them, was; and neither could poſſibly be obſerved by all Mankind, nor can be obſerved by the Jews in their preſent Diſperſion.

Yet, weighty as theſe Conſiderations were, many continued unmoved by them: and inſiſted, that all Men muſt keep the Jewiſh Law; for that, without it, Faith in Chriſt would not ſave them. And this is the Doctrine, which St. *Paul* in his Epiſtles ſo zealouſly confutes, as diſhonourable to, and inconſiſtent with, the Goſpel. He there ſhews, that Jews, as well as Gentiles, are Sinners; and, far from meriting future Happineſs by their good Deeds, can eſcape future Puniſhment for their bad ones only through God's Mercy, which Chriſt hath procured for them, and revealed to them: that the Law of *Moſes* requires perfect Obedience; and, after Diſobedience, makes no Proviſion for Pardon, but through him, whom

its Sacrifices preſignify: that therefore, if they ſought for Juſtification by their legal Works, as they appeared to do, they could not be juſtified at all; and, if they ſought it by the Grace of Chriſt, that ſingly would be ſufficient: and it was doing it a groſs Injury, to imagine, that when the Subſtance was come, the Aſſiſtance of the Shadow was requiſite, to make it effectual: that *Faith had* not only ſaved the earlier Patriarchs, but even *been imputed* to *Abraham*, the Father of the Jews themſelves, *for Righteouſneſs* [s], and a Promiſe had been made him, that *in his Seed all Nations ſhould be bleſſed*, before the very firſt Part of the Law, Circumciſion, was appointed; and Hundreds of Years before the reſt of it had a Being: and therefore the ſame Faith, only rendered more explicit, might well have the ſame Effect, after the Law was taken away: which now only obſcured the Building, it had helped to raiſe.

Theſe Things make the principal Subject of ſome of his Epiſtles, particularly that to the *Romans*, and this to the *Galatians*; throughout the reſt he frequently alludes to them: and bearing them in Mind, is carrying along with

[s] Rom. iv. 3, 22, 23.

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us the true Key to underſtand his Writings; and reconcile him with St. *James*, when the former ſaith, that *Men are juſtified by Faith, without the Deeds of the Law* [h], and the latter, that *by Works a Man is juſtified, and not by Faith only* [i]. St. *Paul* means, that Believers in Chriſt will be ſaved without the Obſervance of the Moſaic Law, or the perfect Obſervance of the natural Law, to which our ſinful Natures cannot attain: and St. *James* means, that Believers in Chriſt will not be ſaved, by their Faith ſingly, without a ſincere, though imperfect, Obſervance of the Precepts of the Goſpel. For, it ſeems, there were ſome of wrong Minds, who fell into an Error, which indeed none of right Diſpoſitions could: and hearing the Apoſtles ſay, that Men were *not under the Law, but under Grace* [k], and that *Chriſt hath made us free* [l] from what the Jews were bound to; either imagined or pretended, that their Chriſtian Liberty exempted them from all Law, and even from that of the Civil Magiſtrate. This, you ſee, was a moſt pernicious Opinion. And not only St. *James* declared againſt it, and St. *Peter* too in his Epiſtle, but St.

[h] Rom. iii. 28. [i] James ii. 24. [k] Rom. vi. 14. [l] Gal. v. 1.

Paul is very expreſs, that though, with Reſpect to the Moſaic Rites, Chriſtians are without Law, yet are they *not without Law* in Regard *to God, but under the Law to Chriſt* [m], and, by his Command, under that of Men alſo.

This then is the Doctrine of the New Teſtament; that according to the Tenor of the Goſpel, neither the Obſervance of the Moſaic Law will juſtify Men, nor the Non-obſervance of it condemn them; but that a thorough Change of Heart and Life from Evil to Good, effected by the Power of God's almighty Grace, is the one Thing needful: *For in Chriſt Jeſus, neither Circumciſion availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumciſion: but a new Creature.* Now we in the preſent Age are ſo intirely ſatisfied about the former of theſe Points, that perhaps we think it loſt Time to hear any Thing ſaid upon it; though a Way is thus opened, both to underſtand the Senſe, and vindicate the Pertinence, of a conſiderable Part of the New Teſtament: and likewiſe to convince reaſonable Perſons, that other difficult Paſſages of holy Writ, if we knew the Circumſtances, to which they refer, might appear equally plain and unexceptionable. But then we are ſtrange-

[m] 1 Cor. ix. 21.

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ly apt, if not to diſbelieve, yet to miſunderſtand the latter Part of the Apoſtle's Aſſertion in the Text: and ſometimes, it may be, to think more implied in it, but often leſs, than really is. And, by ſuch Miſtakes, we come to reſt our Salvation on Things, that will avail us little more, than the Obſervances of the Jews would them. Thus in almoſt the ſame Manner, that they overvalued that Ceremony, which was the Entrance into their Covenant, we over-value our Baptiſm, which is the Entrance into ours; and think well of our ſpiritual State, merely becauſe a ſolemn Promiſe was made in our Names, of which we have lived in the Breach almoſt ever ſince. Or if we can plead ſomething more; perhaps it is a formal Attendance on Prayers and Sermons and Sacraments, without Attention and without Meaning: or it is the Orthodoxy of a Belief, that hath no Influence on our Practice; or the Fervency of a Zeal without Knowledge, or without Charity: it is our Fits of Repentance, and no Amendment: our tranſitory Warmth of good Affections and fruitleſs Purpoſes: our partial Obedience to ſome Precepts of God's Law, with a groſs Neglect of others: or our imagined Obedience to all, with

with a Conceit of our own Righteouſneſs and Merit that deſtroys all: theſe are the Things on which Multitudes rely; whereas Nothing can ſecure us from final Condemnation, but that which the Apoſtle calls *a new Creature*; and which, God willing, ſhall be further explained to you the next Opportunity. But in the mean Time, as we muſt all be ſenſible, that we want ſomething, and moſt of us, it may be feared, a great deal, of being ſuch Creatures as we ought; why ſhould we poſtpone our Reformation or Improvement one Hour longer? So many Years have already paſt over our Heads; and what hath been done in them towards preparing for Eternity? If enough to be accepted, let us thank God, and go on our Way rejoicing, whatever our Condition be in other Reſpects: and preſs forward with redoubled Earneſtneſs, to obtain a double Reward. If we have Cauſe to doubt our State, there can be no Doubt ſo important for us to clear up inſtantly. And if it be a bad one; if we have lived in the Commiſſion of Sins, the Neglect of Duties, the wilful Neglect of any one Duty; what a Proſpect have we before us, and what Need to change it? Let us think of ourſelves as well as we can; are we content,

content, that Death and Judgement ſhould overtake us juſt ſuch as we are? or have we not every one ſomething to do, before we are ready? And if ſo, when ſhall it be done? Not a Moment, beyond the preſent, are we ſure of: and why ſhould the one Thing needful be deferred till the next? Delays are Nothing but Cheats, that we put upon our Souls: and never, I believe, did any one's Reſolution of Amendment hold good, who did not reſolve to amend immediately. If then you mean it at all: *now is the accepted Time, now is the Day of Salvation* [n]. And may God, who now calls upon you by me, grant, that *in this our Day we may all know the Things that belong to our Peace*, leſt they be for ever *hid from our Eyes* [o].

[n] 2 Cor. vi. 2.

[o] Luke xix. 42.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

GAL. vi. 15.

For in Chriſt Jeſus neither Circumciſion availeth any Thing, nor Uncircumciſion, but a new Creature.

IN diſcourſing on theſe Words you may remember I propoſed,

I. To vindicate the Juſtice and Goodneſs of God, in diſtinguiſhing the Jews by a peculiar Covenant:

II. To give an Account of the Expiration of that Covenant, and its ceaſing to oblige or avail any Part of Mankind:

III. To ſhew, what alone can avail Men: explaining for that Purpoſe, the Phraſe of *a new Creature*, by which the Apoſtle here deſcribes it.

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I have finiſhed the two firſt of theſe Heads; and ſhall proceed, without any Repetition, to the third: a Point the more worthy of your careful Attention, both as the Subject itſelf is of the utmoſt Importance, and as the figurative Expreſſions uſed in Relation to it, here and elſewhere in Scripture, are not only deſpiſed and ridiculed by the profane, as unintelligible or extravagant; but, through Inconſiderateneſs or Prejudice, too commonly miſunderſtood by the ſerious; who from thence fall into Notions, which, if they are not rectified, may greatly affect, often their preſent Peace, and ſometimes their future Happineſs.

To explain the new Creation, it will be requiſite to begin with the old. *God created Man in his own Image*[a], holy and pure: and unqueſtionably furniſhed him with ſufficient Powers and Motives to continue ſuch. But by his miſerable Fall he became prone to Sin, as well as mortal. His primitive Uprightneſs, and Strength of Mind, were by that pernicious Indulgence depraved and weakened: his Affections and Appetites grew irregular; and his now *corruptible Body preſſed down*

[a] Gen. i. 27.

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his Soul[b]. The unhappy Diſorders, which he had thus introduced into his own Frame, he muſt of Conſequence tranſmit, as an hereditary Diſeaſe, to his Poſterity: and accordingly in Fact, a Tendency to Evil, and Inability of doing Good, is experienced, more or leſs, by every one that comes into the World. Then as Men grow up, inſtead of correcting their bad Inclinations, they never fail to cheriſh them, if left to their own Ways: by which Means they become worſe of Courſe; generally ſo much worſe, that the Nature, which they received at their Conception, may be accounted virtuous and good, in Compariſon with that ſecond Nature, which by evil Habits they form to themſelves. And thus doubly changed, by original Defilement and actual Tranſgreſſion, far from continuing to be the Creatures which God firſt made, and preſerving that Likeneſs to their heavenly Father, which would give them the Title of his Sons, they are juſtly called in Scripture the *Children of the Devil*[c], and therefore the *Children of Wrath*[d].

The divine Goodneſs, however, was deſirous

[b] Wiſd. ix. 15. [c] 1 John iii. 10. [d] Eph. ii. 3.

to relieve Mankind from the ill Effects, not only of *Adam*'s Sin but their own: and the divine Wisdom provided a Method of doing it, consistent with the Honour of God's Government, through the Interposition of our blessed Redeemer: which Method, from the Beginning, was intimated to Men sufficiently, though obscurely; and afterwards by Degrees more explicitly unfolded. But that he should be reconciled to Sinners, wilfully remaining such, was quite impossible. And therefore, together with a Provision of Mercy on his Part, there must also be a Provision of Amendment on the Part of the Offenders: and in these two Things, inseparably united, the Restoration of the human Race to a State of Happiness must consist. Accordingly we find them closely joined, not only in the more direct and formal Declarations of Scripture concerning this momentous Change, but in all the various Images, under which it is represented.

Sometimes it is expressed by *Adoption:* because that implies our being Aliens and Strangers, received into God's Family and Inheritance: but then it implies also an Obligation to obey him, as dutiful Sons. Else-

where, by a ſtronger Figure, it is called a *Regeneration*, or, which means the ſame, a *new Birth*; becauſe it brings Perſons forth into a new State of Things, where they are to act from other Principles than they did before or would have done elſe, in another Manner, with other Expectations, and grow up to the Maturity of another Character. In ſome Places again, the ſame happy Change is deſcribed, as a *Reſurrection from the Dead:* becauſe it raiſes and reſtores Men, both to the Activity of a ſpiritual Life now, and to the well-grounded Hopes of eternal Life hereafter. But the moſt emphatical Phraſe of all is that in the Text, of *a new Creature*, or Creation. The inward Condition of Man, under the full Effects of his firſt Parents Tranſgreſſion, anſwers too exactly, and yet more after the Addition of his own perſonal Guilt, to that Account in the Beginning of the Hiſtory of the old Creation: *And the Earth was without Form and void, and Darkneſs was upon the Face of the Deep*[e]. But it follows: *And God ſaid, Let there be Light, and there was Light*[f]. Thus the human Soul, in the abovementioned State, is unformed and diſorderly, void of

[e] Gen. i. 2. [f] Verſe 3.

Reaſon and Rule, gloomy and comfortleſs; till *God, who commanded the Light to ſhine out of Darkneſs* [g], ſhine upon the diſmal Chaos, and produce in it new Appearances and Views of Things; till he bring forth Order from Confuſion, and form again in the Heart the illuminating Image of his own holy Nature.

But here it muſt be obſerved, that, in ſome Senſe and Degree, the Scripture Expreſſions and Privileges of a new Birth and Creation belong to all, who are admitted by Baptiſm into the Chriſtian Covenant, though none are intitled to future Happineſs by them, but ſuch as complete their Right to them, if God allows them Time for it, by performing, from a Spirit of inward Piety, the ſeveral Obligations of the Goſpel. When that is preached to Jews or Heathens, every one who believes and is baptized, is *buried with Chriſt* in that ſacred Ordinance, *raiſed up to Newneſs of Life* [h], and adopted of God for his Child. When the Infants of Believers are baptized, they are, by the Solemnity which Heaven hath appointed, *born again of Water and the Spirit* [i], into a better State, than that of Nature. And till either Sort of Perſons forfeit their Claim by

[g] 2 Cor. iv. 6. [h] Rom. vi. 4. [i] John iii. 5.

wilful

wilful Wickedneſs; which it may be hoped ſome never do, though *in many Things we offend all*[k]; they continue Heirs of everlaſting Life. And even when they fall under the Dominion of Sin; though, were they to die in that Condition, future Miſery would be their Portion; and therefore, in Reſpect of any preſent Title to their heavenly Father's Inheritance, they are no longer Children of God: as earthly Sons or Subjects, when they rebel, are no longer ſuch, in Reſpect of any Right to the Favour of their Parents or Princes: yet as, in other Regards, theſe latter continue Sons and Subjects ſtill; ſo the Covenant with the former, by which they were made the Children of God, ſubſiſts, notwithſtanding their Failure of Duty, thus far, that not only by the Terms of it, if they perſiſt, they will be condemned, but by the Terms of it alſo, if they repent, they will be pardoned. And neither the Penitence, nor the Forgiveneſs, of thoſe, who before were initiated into Chriſtianity, and have not ſince rejected it, is ever expreſſed in the Word of God by the Phraſe of the new Birth or new Creature, but theſe are ap-

[k] James iii. 2.

propriated almoſt, if not altogether, to our original Admiſſion into the Goſpel State; into which we enter once for all, by one Baptiſm, *the Laver of Regeneration*. *Nicodemus*, to whom our Saviour in St. *John* gives Inſtructions on that Head, was not then become a Chriſtian. The *Galatians*, *of whom* St. *Paul* ſaith *he travaileth in Birth again, until Chriſt be formed in them*[l], either had apoſtatized from the Faith intirely, or wanted, not the Whole, but the Completion only of the new Birth, by juſter and fuller Conceptions of the Goſpel Doctrine. Nor is there the leaſt Appearance elſewhere in the New Teſtament, of telling any profeſſed Believer, though he had ſinned ever ſo grievouſly, that he muſt be born again; (otherwiſe the ſame Perſon would be born again as often as he falls into any great Wickedneſs, and recovers from it:) but that he muſt *repent, and do the firſt Works*[m], and *be renewed in the Spirit of his Mind*[n]; which belongs, in its Degree, to the beſt of good Chriſtians. And therefore, though inculcating perpetually, that *without Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*[o],

[l] Gal. iv. 19. [m] Rev. ii. 5. [n] Eph. iv. 23.
[o] Heb. xii. 14.

is indiſpenſably needful; yet preaching the Neceſſity of being regenerated, as a Thing ſtill abſolutely wanting to a great Part of thoſe, who call themſelves Diſciples of Chriſt, is uſing a Language, not conformable to that of Scripture, nor indeed of the primitive Fathers, or the Offices of our own Liturgy: which declares every Perſon, who is baptized, to be, by that very Act, *regenerate, and grafted into the Body of Chriſt's Church.* It is true, a different Manner of ſpeaking may be capable of a good Interpretation, and ſhould be interpreted as favourably, as there is Room. But it is neither accurate, nor prudent, to depart from the authorized Senſe of the Words of *ſound Doctrine:* and much leſs is it allowable to blame others for adhering to them.

The firſt and immediate Meaning then of the Apoſtle in the Text, we have Cauſe to think, is, that under the Goſpel, neither entering into the Moſaic Covenant by the appointed Form will do a Man Service, nor the Want of it do him Harm: and that being received, by Baptiſm, into a new State of Grace and Mercy, is equally neceſſary, and equally ſufficient, for Jew and Gentile. But then being admitted even into this State will avail us

Nothing finally, unleſs we live ſuitably to the Laws of it. And as, in the natural World, God's Preſervation of Things hath often been called a continual Creation of them: ſo in the moral, the ſame Notion is more evidently right. The complete Senſe therefore of the Goſpel Creation comprehends, not only the giving of ſpiritual Life at firſt, but ſupporting it in us afterwards. And we ſhall find the Whole of our religious Being, as well as the Beginning of it, to deſerve the Name of the new Creature on two Accounts;

I. Of the Power of God neceſſary to it.

II. Of the Change in Man's Condition, made by it.

I. Of the Power of God, neceſſary to it. Now this Power he hath exerted, not only by giving us originally the Light of Reaſon and Conſcience, and ſuperadding to this the Directions and Motives of external Revelation; but by inwardly operating on our Hearts through his Spirit, exciting and forming us to Piety and Virtue, and reſtraining us from Tranſgreſſion, in ſuch a Manner, that whatever Good we perform, and whatever Evil we avoid, not we by our own Strength do it, *but*

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the Grace of God, which is with us[p]*: by Grace we are ſaved, through Faith, and that not of ourſelves; it is the Gift of God*[q]*: for we are his Workmanſhip, created in Chriſt Jeſus, unto good Works*[r]. This Doctrine the Scripture throughout teaches. We know not indeed, how God influences our Minds: for we know not, how he doth any Thing. But aſſiſting his fallen and weak Creatures is ſo worthy of him; and the Belief of that Aſſiſtance is ſo productive of Thankfulneſs and Love, Humility and pious Reſolution; that ſurely we muſt admit it on his plain Teſtimony: and we can hardly lay too great a Streſs upon it, provided we are careful not to pervert it, either into a Plea for our own Negligence, or an Imputation upon his Juſtice.

If we imagine ourſelves abſolutely incapable of doing any Thing towards our Reformation from Sin, or Improvement in Goodneſs; we excuſe thoſe, who become and continue wicked, as having no Means given them to act otherwiſe; we charge their Guilt upon God, for with-holding ſuch Means from them; and make it unjuſt in him to puniſh them for the

[p] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [q] Eph. ii. 8. [r] Verſe 10.

worſt

worſt Things they do. For no Puniſhment is juſt, where there is no Fault: and it can be no Fault to behave, as we never could help behaving. Beſides, all the Commands and Exhortations of Scripture, all its earneſt Reaſonings and affectionate Expoſtulations, have for their Ground-work the Suppoſition, that Man is able, as he chuſes, either to receive *the Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation*[s], or generally ſpeaking to reject it. We own, the ſpiritual Creation, as well as the natural, is in Appearance wholly aſcribed to God in ſome Places of holy Writ: But, in Appearance alſo, wholly aſcribed to Man in others: as, *Make you a new Heart, and a new Spirit: for why will ye die, O Houſe of Iſrael*[t]. And we are to underſtand the various Texts of Scripture conſiſtently: not to ſtretch figurative Expreſſions, till we force them to contradict literal ones, and evident Reaſon too. Elſe, if we conclude, that becauſe the wicked are deſcribed as *dead in Sins*[u], they can take no Step towards Good; we muſt conclude alſo, that becauſe the religious and virtuous are deſcribed as *dead to Sin*[w], they can take no Step towards

[s] Tit. ii. 11. [t] Ezek. xviii. 31. [u] Eph. ii. 1. [w] Rom. vi. 2.

Evil:

Evil: which the very beſt of us all knows to be falſe. And likewiſe, if we argue thus, we muſt condemn or miſinterpret many clear Paſſages of the New Teſtament, beſides: particularly that of St. *Paul*. *Awake, thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee Light* [x]. Still we readily grant, that Nothing of this can be done otherwiſe, than by the Strength, which God furniſhes: but he furniſhes to every one, that hears the Goſpel, Strength ſufficient. The true Scripture Doctrine therefore is, that divine Grace enables and excites Men to do their Duty: that ſome wilfully refuſe to be guided by it, and fall; while others concur with it, and *work out their own Salvation, God working in them both to will and to do* [y]. But,

II. Our Chriſtian Life is alſo called a new Creation, to expreſs in a ſtrong Manner, how greatly our Condition is changed by it for the better: according to that of the Apoſtle, *If any Man be in Chriſt, he is a new Creature: old Things are paſſed away, behold all Things are become new* [z]. But here again, we muſt guard againſt Miſtakes.

It is not true, that, in Strictneſs of Speech,

[x] Eph. v. 14. [y] Phil. ii. 12, 13. [z] 2 Cor. v. 17.

fallen

fallen Man hath originally no Principle of what is right left in him. If the Whole was loſt by the Fall, ſomewhat hath by the general Grace of God been reſtored ſince. For, though St. *Paul* ſaith, *In me, that is, in my Fleſh, dwelleth no good Thing* [a], yet he ſaith of the ſame Perſon, quickly after, *I delight in the Law of God after the inward Man* [b]. And he ſuppoſes even *the Gentiles* to *do*, in ſome Caſes, to ſome Degree, *the Things contained in the Law* [c]. Indeed Experience proves, that notorious Sinners have often a conſiderable Mixture of worthy Diſpoſitions. We are not therefore to look on thoſe dreadful Pictures, which the ſacred Writers draw, of the moſt depraved of the Heathen, as being juſt Repreſentations, without Abatement, of the natural State of all Mankind. But however, that State is undoubtedly a bad one; deſtitute of ſufficient Strength, unintitled to Pardon of Sin, to Supplies of Grace, to Reward of Obedience: till God, in the Covenant of Baptiſm, affords us Relief in all theſe Reſpects; and ſo *tranſlates us from the Power of Darkneſs into the Kingdom of his dear Son* [d]. Here then begins

[a] Rom. vii. 18. [b] Verſe 22. [c] Rom. ii. 14.
[d] Col. i. 13.

our

our new Creation or Birth: and our remaining Concern is, to behave as dutiful Children to our heavenly Father; and by uſing the preſcribed Means of ſpiritual Growth, be careful to arrive at Fulneſs of Stature and Strength in Chriſt. The firſt Creation was not completed in a Moment, but gradually finiſhed in the Space of ſix Days: after which, *Adam* was left to cultivate the Garden, that God had planted. The ſecond hath no certain Time preſcribed it: but advances faſter or ſlower, with fewer or more frequent Interruptions, to greater or leſs Perfection, according as Men lay hold on, or neglect, the Aſſiſtances always ready for them.

Some are *trained up*, and walk from the firſt, *in the Way, wherein they ſhould go*[e]: and though guilty of many ſmall Errors, through Infirmity and Surpriſe, yet, avoiding great and wilful Deviations, they advance continually to a happy End of their Journey. Now theſe cannot well perceive any ſudden Change in the Condition of their Souls; for their Improvement is uſually very gradual: much leſs any Change in it from bad to good; for it hath always been good from their earlieſt Ac-

[e] Prov. xxii. 6.

quaintance with it. Too many indeed may imagine this falſely: but others, through God's Mercy, may know it to be true, that they have always lived religiouſly, from genuine Chriſtian Principles. Like *Timothy, they have known the holy Scriptures from Children, which are able to make them wiſe unto Salvation*[f]. And ſuch, far from having Reaſon to doubt their Acceptance with God, becauſe they have never experienced grievous Terrors and bitter Sorrows, have the higheſt Reaſon to rejoice, that they have found the *Ways of Wiſdom Pleaſantneſs and Peace*[g], from their very Entrance upon them: and ſhall be rewarded in the End for a whole Life, ſpent as it ought.

But far more commonly, Men have committed heinous Offences, or indulged themſelves in the Omiſſion of important Duties. And then more particular and deep Repentance is neceſſary: followed by a Change of Diſpoſitions within, as well as external Behaviour: elſe their baptiſmal Regeneration will only aggravate their Guilt. But even the Converſion of ſuch is not always accompanied with extremely vehement Agitations of Mind: but theſe differ, according to their various

[f] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [g] Prov. iii. 17.

Tempers,

Tempers, and the free Operations of the divine Spirit. Nay, indeed, ſome feel the moſt tormenting Agonies, yet harden their Hearts againſt them and go on: while others are effectually amended by the Influence of mild Convictions and a calm Concern. And whether it be a Call loud as Thunder, or whether it be *a ſtill ſmall Voice* [h] that ſpeaks: if we do but hearken to it, all is well.

Nor is the Recovery of Sinners always equally ſudden. Some, like St. *Paul*, are awakened and enlightened inſtantaneouſly, throw off a Habit of Wickedneſs at one Effort, and are changed that Moment into Newneſs of Life. Others, after their firſt Alarm, long maintain a doubtful Struggle with their vicious Inclinations: one while ſeeming to have fought the good Fight ſucceſsfully, then entangled anew in their former Bondage: a painful and dangerous Situation: out of which notwithſtanding, through Almighty Grace, there are thoſe who eſcape *into the glorious Liberty of the Children of God* [i]. And to a third Sort, whoſe Diſorders, though but too threatening, are leſs violent, Health is reſtored by

[h] 1 Kings xix. 12. [i] Rom. viii. 21.

ſlow,

ſlow, and gentle, and almoſt imperceptible Steps. Now it may be as impoſſible for theſe to fix the preciſe Time, when their Faith and Penitence were carried juſt far enough to make them Objects of God's Forgiveneſs, as it often is to determine exactly the Moment when the Sun riſes upon the Earth, though it hath evidently been growing light a great While. Without Queſtion, as ſoon as any one hath that Faith in Chriſt, which will produce a Life of good Works, he is juſtified by his Faith alone, and his Sins forgiven. But though God always knows this Time exactly, Men very often may not, or rather very ſeldom can. They may have comfortable Hopes and Perſuaſions, firſt weaker, then ſtronger: and yet, through mere Humility, may entertain ſome Doubts, not of the divine Promiſes, but of their own Qualifications, longer than they have Cauſe. And theſe Doubts may be graciouſly permitted, as very uſeful Incitements both to Diligence and Caution. Our Bible no where teaches, that every one, who is forgiven, knows the Hour of his Forgiveneſs: or even knows with Certainty, that God hath granted it. He muſt indeed, as he amends,

perceive

perceive the Alteration made in him: and in general, a pleaſing Hope and Faith of ſharing in the divine Mercy muſt increaſe along with it: but he may ſtill not be ſure, whether it is yet complete enough to be a Proof, that he hath obtained Pardon. Some are *weak in Faith* [k]: others are *ſtrong* [l] and *abound in it* [m]. But conceiving ourſelves to be of the latter Sort, gives us no Title to paſs Sentence againſt the former. And we ſhould be very fearful of judging our Brethren raſhly; who, with all their modeſt Apprehenſions, may perhaps have as real, perhaps a greater Intereſt in God's Favour, than ſome of thoſe, who declare them to have none. And yet, if theſe hard Cenſures proceed, not from ill Will, or Bitterneſs of Spirit, but from the Warmth of a well-meaning Zeal, even the Perſons injured by them ſhould think mildly, and in the Main, well, of the Authors of them, leſt they retaliate Hardſhip, while they complain of it.

But further, as the ſpiritual Life may, in different Perſons, be attended with different Degrees of Evidence, it may likewiſe advance to different Degrees of Perfection. Indeed, when God created the Heavens and the Earth,

[k] Rom. xiv. 1. [l] Rom. iv. 20. [m] Col. ii. 7.

he *saw every Thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good*[n]. Nor, in the new Creation, is any Part of what he doth defective. But even pious Persons are wanting to themselves: and hence some of them come greatly short of others; and the best, of what they might and ought to have been. For, though all Christians are exhorted to Perfection, and all real Christians labour after it, and, in God's gracious Construction, finally arrive at it; and some have the Title given them by Way of Eminence, on Account of their uncommon Proficiency: yet speaking strictly, *If we say we have no Sin, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us*[o]; nor did even St. *Paul* think, *he had already attained, or was already perfect*[p].

But here, as before, it is of the utmost Importance not to err. They, who allow themselves in the habitual Omission of any one known Duty, or the habitual Practice of any one known Sin; they who have committed any single Act of deliberate gross Sin, without heartily repenting of it, and carefully avoiding it afterwards; are not good Persons with Imperfections, but wicked ones under Guilt and

[n] Gen. i. 31. [o] 1 John i. 8. [p] Phil. iii. 12.

Con-

Condemnation. The Imperfections of the good are of quite another Kind: ſlight Weakneſſes, ſudden Surpriſes, inconſiderate Failures, undiſcerned Unreaſonableneſſes in Temper and Behaviour; honeſtly watched againſt upon the Whole, yet returning from Time to Time, Subjects of daily Concern and general Humiliation. Let no one therefore flatter himſelf, that becauſe all Men have their Faults, he may wilfully indulge his without Danger. Nor let any one be ſo abſurdly cunning, as to think of making a near Bargain in Religion: and contriving to be juſt ſo good, as to eſcape future Miſery; and yet no better, than he needs muſt. Though we aim to do our utmoſt, we ſhall be ſure to fall beneath the Rule of our Duty: but if we aim at leſs, we ſhall be too likely to fail of the Acceptance of our Maker. True Goodneſs includes in it the Love of Goodneſs. No one can be religious and virtuous in earneſt, without ſincerely deſiring to be more ſo; and feeling the Truth of what Wiſdom, in the Son of *Sirach*, aſſerts of herſelf: *They, that eat me, ſhall yet be hungry; and they, that drink me, ſhall yet be thirſty: for my Memorial is ſweeter than*

Honey; and mine Inheritance, than the Honey-Comb [9]. Such therefore, as are, perhaps in no Reſpect, poſitively either vicious or profane, but negligent and thoughtleſs; willing to go to Heaven, with as little Trouble, and as much Indulgence, as ever they can; and, of the two, rather more afraid of being over good, than downright bad; are already, to ſpeak the moſt favourably of them, in a very unpromiſing Condition; and, unleſs they make haſte to get into a better, will ſoon be in a worſe.

Another Thing ſtill, to be obſerved concerning the new Creation, is, that as it may be carried to different Degrees of Perfection, ſo it may be attended with different Degrees of Comfort. Nor is there any Proof from Scripture or Experience, that Perſons equally pious are filled in this World with equal Joy and Conſolation. They, that have a greater Share than ordinary of ſuch delightful Perceptions, ought undoubtedly, if the Tenor of their Lives afford Cauſe for them, to be very thankful. But ſuch as have the leaſt, if *their Hearts condemn them not*, may *have Confidence*

[9] Ecclus. xxiv. 21, 20.

towards

towards God[r]; and be assured, that the Smallness of their present Degree of Comfort *shall work together* with *all* other *Things for their* future *Good*[s]. Indeed the very same Persons, without any other Change in their spiritual State, find, at Times, Elevations, Depressions, Insensibilities, for which they can only account by Variations, visible or supposed, in their bodily Health, or God's unsearchable Will and Pleasure. Again, very bad People too often *trust in themselves, that they are righteous*[t]; and rejoice on groundless Presumptions; while, on the other Hand, though the good must, in their composed Hours, feel some Satisfaction in the Hope, that they are such; and therefore every one ought to reflect, whether he hath, on serious Thought, felt that Satisfaction, or not; yet the Light of God's Countenance hath been frequently withdrawn from some of the best of Men, and *their Souls disquieted within them*[u]. Nay, even our Saviour complained, that, in Respect to the cheering Influences of his Presence, *God had forsaken him*[w]. So that no one can justly think well

[r] 1 John iii. 21. [s] Rom. viii. 28. [t] Luke xviii. 9.
[u] Ps. xlii. 6. [w] Matth. xxvii. 46.

or ill of himſelf on ſuch Accounts, as theſe. The Pſalmiſt hath told us, that *they, who ſow in Tears, ſhall reap in Joy:* and *he that now goeth on his Way weeping, and beareth forth good Seed, ſhall doubtleſs come again with Joy, and bring his Sheaves with him* [x]. And the Prophet hath ſtated both this Caſe, and its Oppoſite. *Who is among you, that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the Voice of his Servant, that walketh in Darkneſs, and hath no Light? Let him truſt in the Name of the Lord, and ſtay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a Fire, and compaſs yourſelves about with Sparks: walk in the Light of your Fire, and in the Sparks that ye have kindled. This ſhall ye have of mine Hand; ye ſhall lie down in Sorrow* [y].

The only ſure Evidence therefore of the Goodneſs of our Condition, is the Sincerity of an Obedience, flowing from Motives truly Chriſtian. And accordingly, what the Apoſtle calls here in the Text *a new Creature*, he calls, in a parallel Place of the preceding Chapter, *Faith working by Love* [z], and in another, *keeping the Commandments of God* [a]. So that

[x] Pſ. cxxvi. 6, 7. [y] Iſ. l. 10, 11. [z] Gal. v. 6.
[a] 1 Cor. vii. 19.

when he saith, the new Creature will avail, and Nothing else, he saith it on Supposition of its being so completed, as to answer its End: which End unless we are careful to attain, by exerting the Principles of the spiritual Life conferred on us in Baptism, and growing up in all Christian Graces; however great a Blessing in itself our sacramental Regeneration is, it will be none to us: but we had better not have been born, better not have been new born, if it only intitles us to Privileges, that we finally forfeit; and become, to use St. *Jude*'s Expression, *twice dead*[b]. Our Saviour hath told us, that the *Tree is known by its Fruit*[c]. And *the Fruits of the Spirit* are the Virtues of a holy Life[d]. If we experience these, we have a Mark of our Acceptance with God, which cannot deceive: all other Marks, all other Feelings, be they ever so lively, ever so pleasing, may. Doubtless, *if any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*[e]. Our pious Dispositions, our well-grounded Comforts, all proceed from the Holy Ghost: and we can have

[b] Jude, Verse 12.
[c] Matth. xii. 33.
[d] Gal. v. 22. Eph. v. 9.
[e] Rom. viii. 9.

neither, without perceiving them. But we may perceive them, without certainly knowing by the Manner of the Perception, that they are his Work: it ſuffices, that, on the Authority of Scripture, we believe they are. And Scripture hath no where taught us to diſtinguiſh, what Impulſes, or Senſations within us, come from God, and what from a different Source, by the mere Strength and Delightfulneſs of them. Without Queſtion, clear and joyful Perſuaſions of our Intereſt in the divine Favour, if we have Foundation to judge that we are intitled to them, are the greateſt Felicity, that we can enjoy in this World. But whoever relies on ſuch Perſuaſions alone, inſtead of examining what Ground they ſtand upon, expoſes himſelf to the utmoſt Danger of being miſled by a heated Imagination, or a ſinful Confidence; of which Kind of Deluſions the Hiſtory of the Church in all Ages hath been full. And whoever determines either his own State towards God, or that of any one elſe, to be a bad one, for Want of ſuch Tokens of its being a good one, contradicts the Rule of holy Writ. *Every one, that doth Righteouſneſs,*

neſs, is born of him[f], and unwiſely dejects himſelf, or uncharitably condemns his Brother.

Let us therefore be very cautious not to fancy the Paths of Religion either narrower or broader, than they are: neither to *make the Heart of the righteous ſad, whom God hath not made ſad; nor ſtrengthen the Hands of the wicked, by promiſing him Life*[g]: for of both theſe Errors we may be guilty at once. But in order to avoid both, let us form our Notions of ourſelves and others by God's unerring Word, interpreted with the Reaſonableneſs and Mildneſs of a truly Chriſtian Temper; and then we ſhall quickly diſcern, that the only ſure Teſt of good and bad Perſons is that, which St. *John* hath ſo ſolemnly delivered from above: *This then is the Meſſage, which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is Light, and in him is no Darkneſs at all. If we ſay, that we have Fellowſhip with him, and walk in Darkneſs*, that is, Wickedneſs, *we lye, and do not the Truth. But if we walk in the Light, as he is in the Light*, if

[f] 1 John ii. 29. [g] Ezek. xiii. 22.

we

we ſtudiouſly imitate the Purity and Holineſs of our heavenly Father, *we have Fellowſhip one with another, and the Blood of Jeſus Chriſt his Son cleanſeth us from all Sin* [h].

[h] 1 John i. 5, 6, 7.

SERMON XVIII.

ACTS vii. 59, 60.

And they ſtoned Stephen, calling upon God, and ſaying, Lord Jeſus, receive my Spirit.
And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud Voice, Lord, lay not this Sin to their Charge. And when he had ſaid this, he fell aſleep.

AS the Intereſts of Religion and Virtue require, that due Regards be paid to the Memory of pious and good Perſons; and as they, who have laid down their Lives for God and their Duty, have given the ſtrongeſt Proofs of their Attachment to the nobleſt Cauſe: ſo the Chriſtian Church hath, from the Beginning, ſhewn diſtinguiſhed Honours to thoſe Profeſſors of its holy Faith, who have ſealed their Teſtimony to it with their Blood. The firſt Martyr, or Witneſs, of this Kind, after the

the bleſſed Jeſus himſelf, was St. *Stephen*, a Man *full of Faith, and of the Holy Ghoſt, and of Power, and of Wiſdom*[a], whoſe Death is related in the Text. And we find in the next Verſe but one, that *devout Men carried him*, with decent Solemnity, *to his Burial*, and made great *Lamentation over him*; undoubtedly mixed with equal Triumph, that he had finiſhed his Courſe in ſo exemplary a Manner: nor were they withheld from it by Fear of the Reſentment, to which ſo public an Inſtance of Reſpect muſt provoke his Murderers, and all their Adherents. Two of the moſt ancient Monuments of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, that we have, excepting the New Teſtament, are the Accounts of the Martyrdom of *Ignatius* and *Polycarp*, both Diſciples of St. *John*, written, at the Time of their Suffering, by the Churches of *Antioch* and *Smyrna*, of which they were Biſhops. And in thoſe they mention, as of Courſe, their Purpoſe of celebrating yearly the Feſtival of their Birth-days, of their Entrance into a better Life, for the Commemoration of their excellent Graces, and the Incitement of others to imitate them. Thus did they provide, that *the righteous ſhould be*

[a] Acts vi. 3, 5, 8, 10.

had

had in everlasting Remembrance[b]: and observed the more particular Direction, given to that Intent in the Epistle to the *Hebrews: Remember them, which have* [*had*[c]] *the Rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God; whose Faith follow, considering the End*, the Event, *of their Conversation*. The rest of the primitive Churches appear to have followed the same Rule: and each to have honoured the more eminent of their own Martyrs, who had been usually their Teachers also, by anniversary Assemblies for preserving the Reverence due to their Characters, and offering up Thanks to God for their Examples.

But the Increase of their Numbers, and the Adoption of the Sufferers of one Church into the Liturgies of others, and the Admission of eminently good Persons, who had *not resisted unto Blood*[d], and the frequent Grants, which in subsequent Ages were made, of so high a Distinction, with little Care of previous Inquiry, multiplied the Returns of these Solemnities very improperly and inconveniently. Then besides, a still greater Evil was, that Praises and Panegyrics too soon grew to be immode-

[b] Ps. cxii. 6. [c] So it should be translated, Heb. xiii. 7.
[d] Heb. xii. 4.

rate,

rate, and afterwards impious. In the Vehemence of oratorical Encomiums and Exclamations, the Saint was called upon as preſent, till by Degrees he was thought ſo: and what at firſt was merely a bold and moving Figure of Speech, became at Length in good earneſt a Prayer; which requeſted of a dead Man, who was unable to hear it, not only that he would intercede with God in Behalf of his Fellow-Servants, but that he would himſelf beſtow ſuch Bleſſings upon them, as no Creature hath in his Power. Things being found in this Condition at the Reformation, it was neceſſary, both to aboliſh intirely theſe unlawful Addreſſes, and to limit the original Sort of Commemorations to a moderate Liſt of Perſons, indiſputably worthy of them. Accordingly no Day is appointed by our Church for the Celebration of any other, than the principal Saints, mentioned in the New Teſtament, it being hard to ſtop, if more were added. And amongſt theſe, St. *Stephen* is the only one, who ſtands ſolely on the Foot of being a Martyr: as indeed it was fit, that the foremoſt, the Leader, of that *noble Army* ſhould be diſtinguiſhed, and choſen, as it were, to repreſent the reſt. Now we ſhall keep

keep his Feſtival in a due Manner, if we make Uſe of it to place before our Thoughts,

I. The Sinfulneſs of Perſecution for Conſcience Sake.

II. The Excellency of bearing it well.

I. The Sinfulneſs of Perſecution for Conſcience Sake.

Taking away the Lives, the Fortunes, the Liberty, any of the Rights of our Brethren, merely for ſerving their Maker in ſuch Manner as they are perſuaded they ought, when by ſo doing they hurt not human Society, or any Member of it, materially, is evidently inconſiſtent with all Juſtice and Humanity: for it is puniſhing thoſe, who have not injured us; and who, if they miſtake, deſerve only Pity from us. Nor is it leſs inconſiſtent with Policy and common Prudence. For thus many will be driven from amongſt us, who might have been very uſeful: and ſuch of the ſame Opinion, as ſtay behind, will be tempted to become either open or ſecret Enemies, in order to free themſelves from the Hardſhips which they ſuffer, and revenge themſelves on the Authors of them: from which Motives have proceeded the bloodieſt Wars, the moſt ſhocking Maſſacres, the moſt heinous Barbarities,

that

that have ever disgraced human Nature. Or should Men comply against their Judgements, and live quietly; from being Hypocrites in the great Point of their Religion, they will too probably grow dishoneſt in others. And though their Poſterity may at Length be ſincere; and ſo what we think Truth be promoted in our Part of the World: yet if the reſt ſhould be induced by our Example to promote what they think Truth, in the ſame Way, it will by no Means be a Gainer on the Whole. Fair Argument and equitable Behaviour are the natural Methods of ſpreading it: and it will never thrive by any oppoſite ones. This being the Caſe, imagining that God can enjoin religious Cruelties, or fail to be diſpleaſed with them, is thinking ſo unworthily and abſurdly of him, that few Things are more ſurpriſing, than the wide Extent and long Prevalence of ſo monſtrous an Error. And Nothing diſtinguiſhes this Age and Nation more to its Honour, than its entertaining in general ſo right Sentiments on the Subject before us.

When and where Perſecution began, hath been controverted. Some have charged the Jews with giving the firſt Example of it, by extirpating the *Canaanites*, and puniſhing Idolatry with

with Death amongſt their own People. But the *Canaanites* were extirpated, not for harmleſs religious Opinions or Obſervances, but for monſtrous and unnatural Cruelties and Impurities, practiſed in their Worſhip and out of it: by which, continued through many Generations, their *Iniquity*, being at Length, as the Scripture expreſſes it, *full* [c]; God appointed the *Iſraelites*, as appeared by the Evidence of numerous Miracles, to execute his Vengeance upon them: which Command was probably deſigned to give them a greater Abhorrence of the like Enormities; and certainly they were bound to obey it. But they neither claimed any Right elſe to puniſh thoſe Nations; nor any Right at all to puniſh other Nations, though guilty of the ſame Crimes.

Nor amongſt themſelves were they authorized to proceed criminally againſt any Perſons on Account of their Faith or Devotions, excepting the Adorers of the neighbouring falſe Deities; or of the true one by an Image. Now ſuch of thoſe Deities, as had been Men, had been ſuch dangerous Patterns of Wickedneſs; and the Service of them all was ſo full of deteſtable Abominations, that paying them any Honour muſt be of very bad Conſequence;

[c] Gen. xv. 16.

but paying them thoſe, which they were underſtood to claim, worſe than Atheiſm itſelf. And ſetting up Images of the true God had ſo ſtrong and immediate a Tendency to lower the Reverence of him, and bring him down to a Level with the reſt, that the Miſchief was only one Degree removed. Beſides, it no Way appears, that the *Hebrew* Idolaters held it their Duty to be ſuch: but Licentiouſneſs, or miſtaken Policy, or Love of Novelty, or ſome wrong Inducement of that Sort, led them to adopt the Divinities of their Neighbours; ſtill believing in *Jehovah*, though practically they forſook him. And therefore, as Conſcience did not require their falſe Worſhip, it was not injured by the Prohibition of it. Nor muſt we forget, that God having condeſcended to be their ſupreme civil Magiſtrate, as well as the Object of their Adoration; owning another God was Treaſon, as well as Idolatry: which never was the Caſe of any one Nation in the World beſides.

It is therefore amongſt the Heathens, that we muſt look for the Origin of real Perſecution. Yet, we confeſs, moſt of them tolerated, and even incorporated, a great Variety of Deities, and Modes of Worſhip: becauſe they

they ſuppoſed, that the former might be all true, and the latter all acceptable. And therefore it was not readily concluded from a Man's having a Religion of his own, that he denied that of the State. But when there ſeemed Cauſe to apprehend that he did, it was deemed, in ſome of the freeſt Conſtitutions, a capital Crime: as the known Caſe of *Socrates* fully proves. There were indeed but few ſuch Puniſhments, becauſe there were but few ſuch Offences, real or pretended: for Men uſually ſpoke and acted as the Laws of their Country preſcribed, whatever they thought: till the Jews, in their Captivities and Diſperſions, refuſing to worſhip any other God, than the one inviſible Maker of Heaven and Earth, provoked, by ſo doing, Pagan Bigotry; and inſtead of being the firſt Perſecutors, were amongſt the firſt Martyrs; indeed to true Piety were the very firſt, *Socrates* having always conformed to the Religion of *Athens*, and being unjuſtly condemned as rejecting it. Yet as the Jews were not commanded to propagate their Faith, but only to profeſs it, which however did propagate it in ſome Meaſure; the Number of their Sufferers for Conſcience Sake, except in the Time of the *Maccabees*, was very ſmall,

when compared with thoſe of the primitive Chriſtians.

For the Apoſtles of our bleſſed Lord, their Companions and Succeſſors, being intruſted by him with a Commiſſion the moſt beneficial to Mankind that ever was; that of notifying to the *Jews*, that their promiſed *Meſſiah* was come; of converting the *Gentiles* from Idolatry, and teaching all Men the genuine Love of God and their Neighbour, as the Way to eternal Happineſs; became, for undertaking this good Work, (though they proceeded in it moſt reſpectfully to Magiſtrates, and inoffenſively to all Men) Objects of public Rage, inſtead of Gratitude. Nor were they only, but their Followers of both Sexes, purſued with warmer Zeal, and deſtroyed by more exquiſite Torments, than the vileſt Malefactors: nor was the Continuance of theſe Barbarities, excepting ſome Intervals, much leſs than three hundred Years. Yet none of them were retaliated, when, in Spight of them all, our Faith, by its own Reaſonableneſs, and the unwearied Patience of its Adherents, had prevailed, and was become the reigning one: not even the bittereſt Perſecutors were puniſhed for all the Murders, which they had committed.

mitted. Nor did any erroneous Chriſtian ſuffer Death from a Chriſtian Magiſtrate for his Errors, for a long while afterwards: nor was any Law made for that End, I believe, in one thouſand Years from our Saviour's Coming. In Proceſs of Time indeed the Rulers of the Church of *Rome*, having already introduced other Corruptions into our holy Profeſſion, ſupported them by introducing this alſo. But when they were become Perſecutors, much truer and more orthodox Chriſtians became once more willing Martyrs. Amongſt theſe our firſt Reformers were eminent: ſince whoſe Days, Liberty of Conſcience and the religious Rights of Mankind have been aſſerted on more ſolid Grounds, in a fuller Extent, and with greater Conſiſtence, than ever was done before. Nor I hope will the Members of our Communion ever forget to exerciſe, either due Caution againſt the open and ſecret Attempts of thoſe Blood-thirſty and Faith-breaking Tyrants, or due Moderation towards all, who peaceably diſſent from us.

And they, who accuſe Chriſtianity of the Cruelties, committed by the Profeſſors of it, ſhould conſider, how much its genuine Profeſſors abominate even the ſmalleſt of them,

and every Tendency to them. But indeed theſe our Adverſaries, who would ſeem to abhor a perſecuting Spirit beyond all Men, and complain of our Religion, as encouraging it, have ſingular Need to examine, of what Spirit they are themſelves: and whether they do not by falſe Imputations, and *cruel Mockings*[f], the only Weapons which they have at Command, perſecute moſt unrighteouſly, (without any Pretence of Conſcience to oblige them to it) both Chriſtian Faith, and natural Piety, without ſparing in ſeveral Inſtances even moral Virtue. A proper Senſe of their own unreaſonable Vehemences would incline them to excuſe, as far as poſſible, thoſe of other Men, and reſtrain them from going on to bring Charges againſt the Innocent and Guilty, promiſcuouſly. But though we were all as bad in this Reſpect, as they imagine the worſt of us to be, it would by no Means affect the Truth of the Scripture Doctrine, which is far from encouraging Force in Matters of Faith. The patriarchal Religion is free from all Shadow of Blame in that Reſpect: the Jewiſh hath been ſufficiently vindicated: and the Chriſtian fully clears itſelf. Our bleſſed Lord reproved his Diſciples, when

[f] Heb. xi. 36.

they

they would have called down Fire from Heaven on the *Samaritans*; who, beſides being both Heretics and Schiſmatics, had uſed him perſonally ill; and told them, *that the Son of Man was not come to deſtroy Mens Lives, but to ſave them* [g]. And though in a Parable he uſes the Words, *Compel them to come in* [h]; both the Whole of the Context, and the Whole of his Inſtructions, particularly thoſe which he gave to his Apoſtles when he firſt ſent them forth, irrefragably prove, that the only Compulſion intended was that of cogent Reaſons and preſſing Exhortations. Accordingly St. *Paul* plainly aſſerts, that *the Weapons of our Warfare are not carnal* [i], but that we are to *inſtruct in Meekneſs thoſe that oppoſe themſelves* [k]. We are not then authorized to raiſe Perſecution, but on the contrary commanded patiently to ſuffer it. And therefore I now proceed,

II. To ſhew the Excellency of this Duty: and particularly, as practiſed by the firſt Chriſtians.

I have already obſerved, that as moſt of the Heathens thought all Religions might be true, they were in little Danger of ſuffering for

[g] Luke ix. 54, 55, 56. [h] Luke xiv. 23. [i] 2 Cor. x. 4. [k] 2 Tim. ii. 25.

any: and amongſt ſuch, as thought their eſtabliſhed Faith and Worſhip falſe and even miſchievous, few or none had the Patriotiſm to declare againſt it, or the Sincerity to refuſe complying with it. The Jews, who, ſo long as they obſerved their Law, were aſſured of national Proſperity, had ſmall Need of Precepts to undergo Perſecution for it willingly: which however they did undergo with admirable Fortitude, when the Sins of the People in general had brought the pious Part, along with themſelves, into Diſtreſs. And it is a moving Deſcription, which the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* gives of their Sufferings. *They had Trial of Mockings and Scourgings, of Bonds and Impriſonment: they were ſtoned, they were ſawn aſunder, were ſlain with the Sword: they went about in Sheep-ſkins and Goat-ſkins, being deſtitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the World was not worthy: they wandered in Deſerts and Mountains, and in Dens and Caves of the Earth*[1].

Their Afflictions however were only occaſional Conſequences of the Idolatry of their Countrymen. But Chriſtianity ſet out from the firſt, with our Saviour's Predictions to his

[1] Heb. xi. 36, 37, 38.

Diſciples,

Diſciples, that *they ſhould be hated of all Nations, delivered up, and killed, for his Name's Sake*[m]; with their Predictions to their Converts, that *all, who would live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, muſt ſuffer Perſecution*[n]; with immediate and dreadful Examples of theſe Truths; with the expreſs Command, *Be faithful unto Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life*[o]. And faithful accordingly they were, to ſuch a Degree, as Nothing but Conſciouſneſs of Truth, and divine Aſſiſtance, could poſſibly make them.

The Apoſtles gave no Proofs of Courage in the firſt Part of their Hiſtory. They all deſerted our Saviour, as ſoon as ever he was apprehended: one of them was terrified, without any particularly great Occaſion, into denying him: and even after his Reſurrection, nay probably his Aſcenſion too, they kept their Aſſemblies very private, *for Fear of the Jews*[p]. What was it then, that changed them into ſuch different Perſons, within the Space of a few Days? What could it be elſe, than the Completion, recorded in the Acts, of our Sa-

[m] Matth. xxiv. 9. [n] 2 Tim. iii. 12. [o] Rev. ii. 10.
[p] John xx. 19. Acts i. 13, 14.

viour's

viour's Promiſe, *Ye ſhall receive Power, after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you: and ye ſhall be Witneſſes unto me in Jeruſalem and all Judea, and unto the uttermoſt Parts of the Earth*[q]. With what ſurpriſing Boldneſs, immediately upon this, doth the late Apoſtate, St. *Peter, ſtanding up with the Eleven, lift up his Voice, and ſay, Ye Men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jeruſalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my Words*[r]: *let all the Houſe of Iſrael know aſſuredly, that God hath made that ſame Jeſus, whom ye have crucified, Lord and Chriſt*[s]? This was not a paſſionate and inconſiderate Courage. For what had there happened, that could raiſe it in them all? And what could poſſibly be milder and more rational, than their uniform Temper and Behaviour: which, their Anſwer to the Threatenings of the Rulers, both ſo reſolutely and ſo decently expreſſes? *Whether it be right in the Sight of God to hearken unto you, more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but ſpeak the Things, which we have ſeen and heard*[t].

As they bore Teſtimony, not merely to

[q] Acts i. 8. [r] Acts ii. 14. [s] Ver. 36.
[t] Acts iv. 18, 19, 20.

Doctrines

Doctrines and Opinions, but to plain and repeated, though miraculous Facts, of which their Senſes were perfect Judges, they could not miſtake. And what could they hope for by attempting to deceive? They muſt each of them know themſelves to be every Way unqualified for conducting a Fraud of this Nature. They had ſeen juſt before, that they could not truſt, either to the Bravery, or the Fidelity, one of another. Or if they could, a great Part of what they ſaid might eaſily be confuted notwithſtanding, if it was not true. For ought appears, they might have returned to their former Occupations with great Safety. But if they went on in this new Way: they knew the Magiſtrates were vehement againſt them; they ſaw the People, at beſt, would do Nothing to ſupport them; and the Fate of their Maſter was full before their Eyes. In theſe Circumſtances, worldly Advantage could not be their Motive. And Fondneſs of acquiring Glory amongſt their Followers was not likely to overbalance the Fear of Puniſhment, in Men of their Education; eſpecially in a Number of them: beſides that, humanly ſpeaking, they could expect neither Glory nor Followers.

And

And in Fact they were held in the loweſt Contempt by moſt Men, and honoured but by few. Or ſhould we ſuppoſe, that contrary to all Probability, and to the expreſs Notices given them, they looked for better Treatment in carrying on their Undertaking, than they found: yet when they perceived their Diſappointment, would no one of them have been ſo honeſt, as to own his Error, and detect his Accomplices; or at leaſt ſo wiſe, as to withdraw himſelf out of Harm's Way? Would they all have gone on, Year after Year, ſupporting Perſecution and Death, one after another; neither taking Warning nor complaining, but rejoicing and triumphing? Hear only, what a Deſcription St. *Paul* gives of their and his own Condition. *God hath ſet forth us the Apoſtles laſt, as it were appointed to Death: we are made a Spectacle unto the World:—even unto this preſent Hour, we both hunger and thirſt, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain Dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own Hands;—we are made as the Filth of the World, and are the Off-ſcouring of all Things unto this Day*[n]. Could they have

[n] 1 Cor. iv. 9, 11, 12, 13.

choſen

choſen to bear this from any other Principle, than that, which he elſewhere mentions? *We are troubled on every Side, yet not diſtreſſed: perplexed, but not in Deſpair: perſecuted, but not forſaken: caſt down, but not deſtroyed. We are alway delivered unto Death for Jeſus ſake, that the Life alſo of Jeſus might be made manifeſt in our mortal Fleſh:—Knowing that he, which raiſed up the Lord Jeſus, ſhall raiſe up us alſo by Jeſus:—for which Cauſe we faint not; but though our outward Man periſh, yet the inward Man is renewed Day by Day*[w]. Nor were they affected in this heroic Manner, only while Death might poſſibly be at a Diſtance from them; but the nearer it approached, the more they felt of the ſame Spirit. *I am now*, ſaith St. *Paul*, *ready to be offered, and the Time of my Departure is at Hand. I have fought the good Fight, I have finiſhed my Courſe, I have kept the Faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, ſhall give me at that Day*[x]. Can there be Words in Language more expreſſive of

[w] 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9, 11, 14, 16. [x] 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

con-

conſcious Integrity, and compoſed Fortitude?

But this was far from the whole Excellence of that Frame of Mind, with which they met Sufferings. Could they have delighted themſelves with the Thought of Vengeance falling on their Adverſaries, either from Men or from God, in the preſent Life or the next, it might poſſibly have given ſome poor Conſolation and Support to corrupt Nature under Torments and Death. But their Maſter's Rule was, *Love your Enemies, bleſs them that curſe you, do Good to them that hate you, and pray for them that deſpitefully uſe you, and perſecute you*[y]. Had he meant only to harden them into a bold unfeeling Obſtinacy, he would never have required of them ſuch Tenderneſs of kind Affection towards Adverſaries: a Temper ſo very inconſiſtent with all the common Excitements to Courage in reſiſting them. And had they found themſelves unable to attain ſuch exalted Virtue, to which none almoſt before them had even made Pretenſions, they would have concealed or dropt his Precept, or explained it away.

[y] Matth. v. 44.

away. But on the contrary, they profeſſed it to its full Extent. *Though I give my Body to be burned, and have not Charity*, that is, univerſal Love to all Men, *it profiteth me Nothing* [z]. And they practiſed it, as they profeſſed it. *Being reviled, we bleſs: being perſecuted, we ſuffer it: being defamed, we intreat* [a]. They expreſſed all the Kindneſs, they made all the Excuſes, for their Perſecutors, which they poſſibly could. Thus the ſame St *Paul: I have great Heavineſs, and continual Sorrow in my Heart,—for my Brethren, who are Iſraelites* [b]. *My Heart's Deſire and Prayer to God for Iſrael is, that they might be ſaved. For I bear them Record, that they have a Zeal for God, but not according to Knowledge* [c]. Nor was this their Manner of ſpeaking, only when at Eaſe, or when they could hope to obtain Favour by it: but, as the Caſe of St. *Stephen* ſhews, their Sentiments were the ſame, under the Certainty, under the actual Pains, of Death itſelf, even when ſuddenly and tumultuouſly inflicted on them. For he prayed at once to the Lord Jeſus, with his laſt Breath, to receive his

[z] 1 Cor. xiii. 3. [a] 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. [b] Rom. ix. 2, 3, 4. [c] Rom. x. 1, 2.

Spirit,

Spirit, and to forgive them that ſtoned him.

Such was the bleſſed Temper of the firſt Witneſſes to the Chriſtian Faith: and their Succeſſors inherited a noble Degree of it. They could not indeed give an equally ſtrong Teſtimony to the original Facts, on which it was built; but they atteſted many ſubſequent ones of great Importance. And not only their embracing it, as they did, contrary to all the Prejudices of common Opinion, and all the Dictates of every wrong Inclination, makes it neceſſary to preſume, that they muſt have had powerful Evidence for it: but their Perſeverance in profeſſing it, amidſt every Thing terrible in Life or Death, fully proves them to have been throughly ſincere, and ſingularly magnanimous. Indeed it proves further, that more than ordinary Strength was vouchſafed to them from above. For though natural Conſtancy and Bravery have in ſome Inſtances performed Wonders, yet the Performers have been few in Proportion: whereas the primitive Chriſtians in general, of both Sexes, all Ages, all Ranks, underwent the moſt grievous Inflictions with the calmeſt Patience. Obſerve

too:

too: They could have little Hope of diſtinguiſhing themſelves in the Opinion of their Fellow-chriſtians by ſuffering. For, though a few of the principal Martyrs were highly honoured, yet the reſt were too numerous, either to be remembered after their Death, or have Notice taken of them at the Time of it. Nor did their Intrepidity ariſe from being trained up to the Reſolution of Martyrdom. For this would often have failed: and beſides, new Converts, juſt made, as boldly ſuffered Death, as any others; nay, ſometimes Perſecutors themſelves became Converts on the Spot, and died with thoſe, whom they had brought to Execution. Still it was not merely a ſudden Vehemence, which they catched one of another. For not only particular Perſons had often the Leiſure of long Impriſonments to cool in: but the whole Church had many and conſiderable Intervals of Peace. Yet, whenever Perſecution began again, it found the Generality of Chriſtians in the ſame Spirit, which they ſhewed before: reſpectful in the higheſt Degree to civil Authority; but unmoveable to an equal Degree from their Duty to God: where they were ever ſo few, not to be forced

or perſuaded into the ſlighteſt Act of Idolatry; where they were ever ſo many, not to be provoked into a ſingle Attempt of Rebellion; or into making or joining any Party or Faction for their own Security; though the frequent Changes in the State gave them inviting Opportunities for it. In the comfortleſs Exerciſe (for ſo it muſt appear to common Spectators,) of this cool paſſive Courage, infinitely more difficult than the active and enterprifing Sort, they patiently perſevered for three hundred Years. The Wonderfulneſs of the Behaviour moved Men to inquire into the Grounds of it: they found them good; they came over; and the Empire was become in Effect Chriſtian, before the Emperors ceaſed to perſecute.

The unjuſtifiable Veneration addreſſed by the Church of *Rome* to Saints and Martyrs hath deterred almoſt all the reformed Churches, except our own, from paying them even due Honours. And now amongſt ourſelves, Prejudice againſt Religion in ſome, and Indifference to it in others, hath made theſe excellent Perſons be regarded commonly, either with a malignant or a negligent Eye. But if they,

who have acted or ſuffered gallantly, for the Liberties or other Intereſts of a ſingle Nation, have been reverenced by diſtant Ages, and all their Faults hid under that one Virtue: how much higher Eſteem do ſuch Patriots deſerve, as have born Teſtimony with their Blood againſt the Tyranny of Idolatry and immoral Superſtition; who have lived in Miſery and died in Torment, to aſſert the Faith of one wiſe and good Maker and Ruler of all, of Pardon for Sin, and Aſſiſtance in Virtue, derived to us by Methods of infinite, though myſterious Goodneſs; who have given to Mankind, both by their Doctrine and Example, the juſteſt Rules of worthy and prudent Conduct in this Life; and ſpread through the World an Aſſurance, founded on God's expreſs Promiſe, (which alone could ſupport it,) of endleſs Felicity in a Life to come! Should our Accounts of them be ever ſo imperfect, or meanly written: ſhould any of them appear no otherwiſe great, than as they were admirably good Men: ſhould their Zeal have ſometimes tranſported them beyond Diſcretion; (though ſuch Tranſports were few, and always condemned by the Body of Chriſtians:) Or ſhould other

and even considerable Frailties be found mixed with the Excellencies of some of them: yet, so long as we know, that they were and did what hath now been mentioned; we have surely Cause to hold them for ever in most honourable Estimation, and respect the Gospel of Christ much the more highly on Account of such Witnesses to its Truth and Efficacy.

But admiring them is Nothing, unless we also imitate them, in their Solicitude for its Advancement, in their steady Adherence to God and their Duty, in their Contempt of worldly Advantages and Pleasures, Losses and Punishments; in their Meekness under Injuries, in their Resignation under Pains and Afflictions, in their Love to their Fellow-Christians and Fellow-Creatures, in their lively Faith of a future Recompence. We are not called, as they were, to *take joyfully the spoiling of our Goods* [d], *to suffer Trouble, even unto Bonds, as Evil-doers* [e], to undergo Shame and Torture, and *to die for the Name of the Lord Jesus* [f]. No *Temptation hath taken us, but such as is common to Man* [g]. Ordinarily speaking, we have

[d] Heb. x. 34. [e] 2 Tim. ii. 9. [f] Acts xxi. 13. [g] 1 Cor. x. 13.

Nothing

Nothing to perform, but what conduces on the Whole to every one's preſent Benefit: and we have Nothing to bear on Account of our Religion, but perhaps a little trifling Ridicule from the vain and the vicious. Even ſuch Perſecution indeed is very wicked in them; but needs not in the leaſt be formidable to us. And if for that alone, we are aſhamed to *confeſs* our Saviour *before Men*, well may we expect that he ſhould *deny us before his Father, which is in Heaven* [h].

Let us therefore *hold faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering* [i]: never do any Thing inconſiſtent with it for temporal Proſpects or Fears: never pay Court to the irreligious, by mean Compliances with their Talk or Behaviour, in Hopes of better Quarter from them; for it will be much harder to ſtop afterwards, than to maintain our preſent Ground: yet never be moved either to Paſſion againſt them, or Uncharitableneſs towards them; but freely own their good Qualities, while we carefully preſerve an Abhorrence of their bad ones; pity their Unhappineſs, while we con-

[h] Matth. x. 32, 33. [i] Heb. x. 23.

demn

demn their Sins; and earneſtly pray, that they may repent and be forgiven. For thus ſhall we *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things*[k]; and be *Followers of them, who through Faith and Patience inherit the Promiſes*[l].

[k] Tit. ii. 10. [l] Heb. vi. 12.

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